

INVISIBLE REVOLUTIONS:  
WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE 1871 PARIS COMMUNE

by

Pamela Joan Stewart

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## DEDICATION

To Kathryn Babayan,  
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## ABSTRACT

This dissertation interrogates gender as revealed in the lives of women in Paris from the declaration of a republic on 4 September 1870 through the violent demise of the Paris Commune on 28 May 1871. Centering gender at the analytical hub of public and private space exposes the disruption to these traditional categories, provided by the siege and Commune. This study argues against traditional histories of the Commune that have reduced women's visibility during the preceding months of the Franco-Prussian War and the four-and-one-half month siege of Paris. With the advent of the Commune on 18 March 1871, working women often continued their previously-acceptable activities of the siege, rather than suddenly asserting themselves as "wild-eyed viragoes" during the revolutionary Commune. To verify this, the first two chapters cover 4 September 1870 through the siege's conclusion on 28 January 1871; then, three chapters investigate women's Commune-era verbal assertions, political pressure tactics, and military presence. Combined, these chapters demonstrate that prioritizing the role of gender in the private and public lives of working women brings to life their substantive contributions to the radical reordering of socio-economic norms within the "working man's revolution" of the Paris Commune.

Employing interdisciplinary theory, this work analyzes autobiographical experiences of Victorine Malenfant Rouchy and other women, as well as the production of siege- and Commune-era discourse more broadly. It argues against prior historians of the era who relied on particular, often incomplete, sets of documents for their conclusions, which have reduced women's significance to a small group of activists.

Two recent works have contributed analyses of gendered representation and three women leaders, but have not assessed less prominent, sometimes anonymous, female residents of Paris who did not necessarily appear in conventional record sets. A range of documents therefore reveals women's contributions from the genesis of the Commune through its annihilation during its final, "Bloody Week," in which government troops specifically targeted women. Investigating the attention paid to women's bodies during that last week of May 1871, when somewhere near 30,000 people died, raises the issue of gendered violence against women, a topic that remains underanalyzed.

## INTRODUCTION: INVISIBLE REVOLUTIONS

On 4 September 1870, Victorine Malenfant Rouchy led her child and husband into the Paris crowds celebrating a new republic, declared in the midst of the Franco-Prussian war. With the Prussian army marching toward Paris for what was to become a four-and-one-half month siege, she registered for municipal employment organized by women, producing military jackets to help support her family. Although she was trained as an *ambulancière* for field hospitals, military government officials denied her a post. Malenfant Rouchy wrote a letter to a newspaper, publicly reclaiming women's right as *citoyennes* to attend the wounded on the battlefield. Making use of her network of women's conduits to military officialdom, she eventually gained her desired *poste du combat*, serving throughout the war, which ended on 28 January 1871. As the Commune (18 March – 28 May 1871) verged on erupting, Malenfant Rouchy lost her son and another child living with her family to the lingering effects of the devastating siege. She reported immediately for military duty in defense of the new life she thought the Commune could inaugurate. Organizing meals for military personnel, as well as still-starving civilians, she blended traditional spheres of public and private as she served, later maintaining her *ambulancière* post during this civil war. Between 21 – 28 May 1871, the final “Bloody Week” of the Commune, Malenfant Rouchy dressed in boy's clothing, cut her hair, and avoided summary execution as she hid on her body, a red flag, dagger, and diary of her participation. The government of “moral order” – and her

mother for a time – believed her dead, leading to the title of her memoir, *Souvenirs d'une morte vivante*.<sup>1</sup>

Malenfant Rouchy's tale highlights the need to interrogate gender as it relates to the lives of women in Paris from the declaration of a republic on 4 September 1870 through the violent demise of the Paris Commune on 28 May 1871. In 1870-71, women did not use the term, *gender*; however, the Commune era reveals that many understood that the socially, politically, and culturally constructed roles of men and women were unequal, organizing women's lives in ways that did not benefit them. When taken as a whole, the siege and Commune era exposes underlying gendered tensions of working women's lives that rose to the surface, expressing themselves in women's words, political pressure tactics, and military participation.

Placing the "gendered organization of both public and private space at centre stage," this study first argues that working women's actions during the Commune were often extensions of their acceptable public participation as *citoyennes* during the Prussian siege, rather than a sudden revolutionary aberration of wild-eyed viragoes.<sup>2</sup> Therefore,

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<sup>1</sup> Victorine Brocher, *Souvenirs d'une morte vivante* (Paris: François Maspero, 1977 [1909]).

<sup>2</sup> Joan B. Landes, *Feminism, the Public and the Private* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 1. Within this dissertation, I employ the terms, "working women," "working-class women," "women of the popular classes," and components of those terms such as, "the popular classes," somewhat interchangeably in identifying socio-economic positions. Here, the terms incorporate those not receiving the political and social benefits of liberal capitalist expansion in Paris, and France more generally. I exclude the titled male aristocracy, whether or not they personally benefited. Certainly shopkeepers and other artisans figure in these classes as defined here; due to the siege and the government not returning to Paris, the economic positions of these groups had suffered tremendously, closing perhaps as many as 40,000 businesses and reducing them to a position alongside those occupying a clear Marxian working-class status. By the Commune era, prior access to literacy or further education often proved the biggest difference between the artisan and proletarian realms, rather than economic standing. This appears especially true for women. Following a mere suggestion by Marx, but analyzed more fully by later feminists, using this definition for popular classes and related terms allows for discussion of women as a class, though certainly some women received some benefits from their association with men of the bourgeoisie.

two chapters examine women's activities in Paris between 4 September 1870 and February 1871. The next three chapters detail the weeks of the Commune in order to demonstrate the continuation of siege-era viewpoints, arguing that many ordinary women placed gender at the hub of their understanding of the Commune's utopian possibilities. To this end, this work situates gender as the center point of a compass, around which women's understandings of republican concepts of free speech and assembly, citizen-soldier service, revolution, and economic and social problems more generally become discernable. Wartime expanded women's normative public roles both during the siege and then, the Commune; therefore, prioritizing the role of gender in the private and public lives of ordinary working women brings to life their substantive contributions to the radical reordering of socio-economic norms within the "working man's revolution" of the Paris Commune. This "people's" revolution has not previously been viewed from the vantage points of so many ordinary working women, some of whose names remain lost to history.

In addition to Malenfant Rouchy, this study draws upon a range of sources, arguing for the significance of otherwise unknown women who occupied the category of *le peuple* and whose presence contributed to this turbulent era that fomented the birth of the Third Republic. Malenfant Rouchy's memoir represents the efforts of only the minority of women who wrote of their experiences during the siege and Commune. Consequently, while this work takes the lives of women seriously, as Cynthia Enloe suggests, it also assesses those lives in relation to the discursive elements permeating



them.<sup>3</sup> This project therefore includes not only the “informal, private, casual conversations, shared jokes, gestures, and rituals,” found in memoirs and letters, and which create and sustain relationships, but the official and public discourse of groups and institutions – such as that found on posted government calls to service or noted in police files.<sup>4</sup>

Post-structuralists such as feminist historian, Joan Scott, emphasize the ways in which gender identities and relations are constructed by discourse, viewing the analytical primacy of women’s personal testimony as naïve.<sup>5</sup> However, while language is the tool used to articulate gender identities and relations, women’s material experiences, such as forced sex, pregnancy, and hunger can motivate practices that also affect discourse. Testimonies of experience, motivations, and practices such as those within memoirs and letters can create, integrate, or respond to dominant discursive elements. They are also the primary sources that women created for their own purposes, claiming to preserve their experiences. By analyzing autobiographical records, as well as the production of siege- and Commune-era discourse more broadly, I situate women’s accounts as evidence of agency, but also indicative of women’s awareness of and participation in broader discourse.

Assessing a broad spectrum of sources relevant to women’s participation instead of a narrow range of records increases women’s visibility. To apply a phrase of Joan Scott to the oft-invoked *le peuple* of the Commune, the embodiment of a disembodied

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<sup>3</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *The Curious Feminist: Searching for Women in a New Age of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Enloe, *The Curious Feminist*, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Joan W. Scott, “Experience,” in *Feminists Theorize the Political*, Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (New York: Routledge, 1992), 22-40.

*peuple* included the bodies of women.<sup>6</sup> Noticing how governments called upon so many ordinary women, as well as closely surveying what they did during this tumultuous period clarifies the role of female “people” in a revolution of *le peuple*.<sup>7</sup> Prior assessments have overlooked the sheer numbers of working women in this workers’ revolution, also omitting the influence of siege experiences as that revolution approached.

Following an analytical path of Kathleen Jones and Françoise Vergès, I argue that the siege served as a “training ground” for women in three specific areas: verbal expressions, political pressure tactics, and military participation.<sup>8</sup> Women’s experiences in these arenas have not received attention in previous works on the siege.<sup>9</sup> After the declaration of a republic on 4 September 1870 and during the siege that followed, women’s essential roles in Paris’s survival contributed to discursive elements directed at, and inclusive of, women’s active participation in defense of the city and the nation. Certainly some women participated due to motivations having little to do with patriotic discourse; nonetheless, over the months of hardship that followed, those women who remained in Paris provided items and services that sustained the militarized city – and an

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<sup>6</sup> In discussing *parité* in 1990s France, Scott employs this phrase to describe the abstract “nation,” implied within French revolutionaries’ understanding of universalism. “French Universalism in the Nineties,” *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 15, No. 2 (Summer 2004), 34.

<sup>7</sup> Any definition of *le peuple* certainly extends beyond its use during the Commune. However, the Government of National Defense employed the term frequently in addressing Parisians during the siege, discursively linking its usage to those remaining in Paris. Additionally, its ubiquitous use during the Commune allied participants with the term.

<sup>8</sup> For the first suggestion of the siege as a training ground for women, see, Kathleen Jones and Françoise Vergès, “‘Aux Citoyennes!’: Women, Politics, and the Paris Commune of 1871,” *History of European Ideas* 13, No. 6 (1991): 713.

<sup>9</sup> The siege of Paris by Prussian troops, from ~19 September 1870 – 28 January 1871 remains substantially underanalyzed other than as a formal military venture. Most recently, Hollis Clayson’s, *Paris in Despair: Art and Everyday Life under Siege (1870-71)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002) is the first English language book in decades to examine the siege, primarily analyzing print media. Although *Paris in Despair* assesses the era relevant to its fascination with female sexuality, Clayson does not analyze the role of ordinary Parisian women in events. For earlier sources, see Melvin Kranzberg, *The Siege of Paris* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1950) and Robert Baldick, *The Siege of Paris* (London: Batsford, 1964).

image of a unified republic. Unheralded in their defense of the capital, workers in Paris believed they bore the brunt of “republican” economic and military policy in the siege’s aftermath. While seven weeks separate the siege’s end from the declaration of the Commune, for working women, little, if anything, had changed. The experience of the siege and its aftermath provided motivations and practices that contributed substantially to the Commune’s genesis, maintenance, and eventually, violent demise at the hands of troops of the nascent republic. Siege experiences, as well as those during the ensuing weeks, also contributed to Commune discourse. As such, I propose that women workers, and often, those who worked along side them, saw Commune participation as a continuation of siege practices, not as entirely new endeavors.

With a crescendo of discourse about equality during the Commune, working women’s assertions of their significance, even equality, at times transcended what some have seen as the paradox of women’s claims to the full rights of citizenship. For France in particular, scholars have argued that given male-based definitions of the term, women’s access to citizenship relied on a rhetoric of sameness – even identicalness – with males or essentialized difference based in their sex category.<sup>10</sup> Related to women’s

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<sup>10</sup> Joan W. Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996); Karen Offen, “Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach,” *Signs* 14, No. 1 (1988): 119-157. Critiques of Offen’s arguments by Ellen Carol Dubois and Nancy F. Cott and Offen’s responses, *Signs* 15, No. 1 (1989): 195-209. Although imprecise, the dichotomy is most often characterized as the “difference vs. equality” debate, although those terms are not opposites, a point only recently engaged in analysis. For that clarification, Ruth Lister, *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 96. Lister, however, argues that “ignoring” women’s difference from men reintroduces – or reinforces – inequality in the concept of citizenship. My arguments reveal that for the Commune era, women found ways neither to ignore nor prioritize essentialized difference. For an overview of feminist perspectives on citizenship and on (re)creating it in a contemporary context, see Amanda Gouws, ed., *(Un)thinking Citizenship: Feminist Debates in Contemporary South Africa* (New York: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2005), especially 1-17. For an overview, and attempted reconciliation, of the debate about experience and discourse, see, Penny Summerfield, “‘They Didn’t Want

efforts to gain equal civil rights based in national citizenship, Joan Landes argues that since about 1750, women encountered discrimination based in a constitutional denial of their rights under law; after 1850, women's movements responded to this fact.<sup>11</sup> Situated within this era of women's responses, the Commune represents a disjuncture when constitutionalism and law based in bourgeois interests came under attack by a range of people who saw limited advantages from those forms as they had been constituted up to that point. The Commune government retained male suffrage as its "universal" and attempted to abide by constitutionally-based legal precedence; simultaneously, the Commune's mere existence in defiance of a nominal republic and its laws also explicitly disregarded prior justification for many things, including women's constitutional and legal exclusion from civil rights. Citizenship in Paris's Commune, then, could not mimic citizenship outside it. As far as we know, no cry of *Liberté, Égalité, Parité* erupted in Paris during the Commune as it did in the 1990s; however, those occupying the category of 'women' entered the public arena, individually and at times, collectively, arguing for their place as contributing members of the New Order the Commune suggested.<sup>12</sup>

Women's awareness, seizure, even creation of communarde discourse espousing equality, a total reshaping of society, and the need for immediate aid from all components

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Women Back in That Job!': The Second World War and the Construction of Gendered Work Histories," *Labour History Review*, 63, No. 1 (Spring 1998): 83-104.

<sup>11</sup> Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere*, 4.

<sup>12</sup> Joan Scott discusses the conception of 1990s "*parité*," as developing "entirely within the terms of the discourse of abstraction so critical to French republicanism," and that "if women were to achieve the status of individuals [rather than females or women], nothing less than full equality was required." In theory, *parité* provided a recognition that "anatomical difference was universal," but that meanings attributed to that fact had resulted in the exclusion of those with particular anatomical components – females – from equality. The discourse and events of the Commune offered individuals occupying the category of 'women' the potential of that full equality, though to my knowledge, the term, *parité*, was never used in this fashion. See Scott's, "French Universalism in the Nineties," 41.

of “*le peuple*,” provided them a rhetorical and material opportunity – however brief – to assert themselves in unprecedented ways.<sup>13</sup> Given this opportunity, working women and their allies often expressed and validated their agency in gendered terms, revealing their priorities. Few historians have stopped to consider communardes’ participation in the discourse of the post 1850 era, which Landes posits as significant in understanding women’s arguments against their omission from constitutional consideration. Unlike the balance of nineteenth-century examples, the Commune weeks reveal a web of government, neighborhood, and personal discourse frequently noting women’s public rhetorical, political, and military roles in positive ways, exposing an exceptional moment. Many women took advantage of this opportunity to press for changes in gendered norms.

I posit that during the Commune, women’s words, political actions, and military experiences express forms of agency that often incorporated considerations of gender, class, as well as personal and family agendas reflecting the material realities of their lives. The material considerations of day-to-day life and the Commune’s rhetoric encouraged women to assert verbally, politically, and militarily that the Commune had an obligation to address the inequities affecting their lives. Without a model for structuring a movement for equality (post-1850 or otherwise) or advocating suffrage, women nonetheless initiated the Commune on 18 March 1871. Drawing on siege-era experience and long-standing democratic political practices such as demonstrations, petitioning, and

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<sup>13</sup> Throughout the dissertation, I use the term, *communarde(s)*, as the universal for those who participated in events, although more traditionally, the masculine, *communard(s)*, has served that purpose. Most often, the term refers to women, but encompasses participants more generally. Certainly not all those perceived to be participants at the time – male or female – formally allied themselves with the Commune, as will be addressed later. Consequently, “women of the Commune,” “women in Paris during the Commune,” “working women whose interests the Commune represented,” and other terms are employed in describing nuances. In this work, *communard(s)* will indicate only specifically male subjects.

postings of public meetings, they influenced its day-to-day development and armed in its defense, revealing themselves in many archival and published primary records.<sup>14</sup>

Women's Commune actions, such as those of Malenfant Rouchy, suggested that they anticipated being seen as equal participants. Closely surveying women's expression of agency in their daily lives has previously provided feminist historians with alternative conceptualizations of work; here, analysis of women's agency during the Commune reveals alternative conceptualizations of that revolution.<sup>15</sup>

Other revolutionary moments tend, at least temporarily, to disrupt traditional social relations, but communardes of both sexes desired to make disruptions permanent. The advent of the siege had meant that women's contributions no longer were validated only within the gendered-female private particular, but could be encompassed within the gendered-male public universal.<sup>16</sup> The siege's emergency conditions sustained the

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<sup>14</sup> Kathleen Jones and Françoise Vergès make this point in their discussion of women's exclusion from most working class organizations prior to the Commune, as well as Proudhonian-socialist logic preferring them in the home. Though fairly brief, during declarations of republics in France some women had, however, asserted their demands for various forms of equality. Jones and Vergès, "*Aux Citoyennes!*," 713. Rachel G. Fuchs, *Poor and Pregnant in Paris: Strategies for Survival in the Nineteenth Century* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers, 1992), 5-6 for the significance of examining, especially poor women's, lives at the points they enter, and for the time they remain on, the stage of the historical record.

<sup>15</sup> For the theoretical parallel, Kathleen Jones, "Citizenship in a Woman-Friendly Polity," *Signs* 15, No. 4 (1990): 784-5.

<sup>16</sup> Landes, *Feminism, the Public and the Private*, 142-143. In *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1988), Landes refutes Jürgen Habermas's articulation of the public/private spheres. According to her, by reducing women's discourse and their interests to the particular, Habermas "misses the masquerade through which the (male) particular was able to posture behind the veil of the universal." The term, "public," in this dissertation, takes in spatial and political components. My use follows the critique of Jürgen Habermas by Joan Landes for France and Nancy Fraser more broadly, in which, among other things, they question the usefulness of Habermas's exclusionary public spaces, defined by limited male bourgeois interests. Landes, *Feminism, the Public and the Private*, especially Chapter Five: "The Public and Private Sphere: A Feminist Reconsideration," and Fraser, "What's Critical about Critical Theory? The Case of Habermas and Gender," in *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989) and "Rethinking the Public Sphere," *Social Text* 25, No. 6 (1990). Most recently, *Going Public: Feminism and the Shifting Boundaries of the Private Sphere* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004),

expansion of women's rightful place in the public sphere, which might otherwise have been quickly circumscribed if Paris had surrendered earlier, as national leaders encouraged. Geographer, Kristen Ross, notes that urban geographers proclaim the Commune, "the first realization of urban space as revolutionary space," based in their perception that it served as a fundamentally spatial event that revolted against imbedded forms of social regimentation.<sup>17</sup> Applied here to the gendered space of public and private, the Commune therefore provided women an opportunity to revolt against the gendered regimentation of those spheres. Consequently, women could explicitly render influence in political and military matters as they integrated the formerly divided spheres that restricted their equality.<sup>18</sup> In that sense, they created what Nancy Fraser terms, "a multiplicity of publics" suiting their needs, and in their practices and discourse, disallowed enforcement of masculinist universals.<sup>19</sup> If arrested, put on trial, and/or sentenced, the words, political presence, and military participation of women played key roles in finding them guilty. Therefore, analyzing the Commune with an eye to those three components during the creation of new "publics," allows for a way to integrate

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edited by Joan W. Scott and Debra Keates, offers a "series of unusual 'takes'" on the operations of public and private, all from feminist perspectives.

<sup>17</sup> Kristen Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

<sup>18</sup> In this dissertation, "political" is broadly defined, but related to organizing or creating change in public affairs, generally involving a state or municipality. However, it is not limited to official (male) government access as they only arena of exercising that political power. This is due, not only to women's formal exclusion from that arena during their lifetimes, but to the fact that republicans, since at least the late 1700s, often argued that other arenas have significant political value. The abolition movement in England serves as one example of the range of political arenas accessed in organizing change in public affairs, when very few men held suffrage privileges. That some women understood that point in 1870-71 implies that what others have argued was their fundamental "lack" at the time was, in actuality, a valuable tool. Lastly, when the sex of the recorder is the primary reason for categorizing a report as "social," rather than "political," I universalize the political to include women's lives.

<sup>19</sup> Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere," 77. In the case of the Commune, the creation of Fraser's, "multiplicity of publics," was part of the spatial revolution, to which Kristen Ross refers. *The Emergence of Social Space*, especially 3-4.

what women had to say about events, with extant police and trial archival sources focusing on determinations of guilt. Though brief, the timing and context of the Commune contributed substantially to women's truncated opportunity to exert their public value as equal members of society.

I propose that the Commune – as Landes suggests for second-wave feminism – “offered women a public language” as well as a forum for their private grievances against their gendered oppression, recreating definitions of public participation.<sup>20</sup> Government sponsorship of forums for this discourse merged women into a more inclusive – but later “illegitimate” – public sphere. A volatile few weeks, the Commune suggests a germination – and eventual aborting – of what Commune historian and feminist political theorist, Kathleen Jones, describes as, “a women-friendly polity.”<sup>21</sup> By definition, this polity is inclusive of, though not defined by, difference, rather than indicative of an inverted sex-based dominance. It “must root its democracy in the experiences of women and transform the practices and concept of citizenship to fit these varied experiences, rather than transforming women” to fit prior definitions of citizenship.<sup>22</sup> Reflecting this polity, women's words, political pressure, and military actions molded the Commune, as well as led to their convictions. Although police and military judicial officials were not always correct in their assessments - if we believe the women themselves - they scrutinized women's past words, political influence, and the markers of their military

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<sup>20</sup> Landes, *Feminism, the Public and the Private*, 1.

<sup>21</sup> Jones, “Citizenship in a Women-Friendly Polity,” 781-812. In their significant, if limited, work on the Commune, Jones and Vergès quote one woman during the Commune who evinced her revulsion for cowards by writing, “my woman citizen's heart is afraid that the weakness of [male] Commune members will abort our future.” Jones and Vergès, “*Aux Citoyennes!*” 720.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 811.



participation. While communardes slipped across formerly gendered boundaries with some ease, in the Commune's aftermath, so did prosecutors as they sought convictions.

In addition to the value Commune women appear to have placed on speech, pressure tactics, and military roles, the reactionary bourgeoisie, police, and military tribunals took note of the same, seeming to understand the Commune as a unique moment for women's public roles. As women's trial records show here, few prosecutorial boundaries delineated women's "unofficial" actions from men's "official" political and military offices. Carrying a weapon, wearing National Guard attire, or calling citizens to the barricades could convict a man or woman. If the Commune's existence was by definition, illegitimate, women's actions existed as part of a universalized, "unofficial" whole, rather than a gendered particular. Women did not receive the bulk of sentences, but prosecutors saw them as responsible for political and military acts, with convictions reflecting that perception. Military courts tried women who were thought to have taken part in an insurrection – in this case, a political, (il)legal, and military act, even though none charged women with treason. This may indicate the challenge authorities faced in conceptualizing any woman as a legitimate political or military player outside the context of the Commune. Additionally, given that a charge of treason requires acknowledgement of vulnerability on the part of a government, it may also reveal discomfort in admitting that the nation was vulnerable to the revolutionary clout of women. Despite the discomfort, convictions highlight women as political and military actors, although these same women did not have formal access to political or military roles within the republic now prosecuting them. However, the well-known

public roles of communardes encouraged their enemies to accept that many had indeed engaged as political and military agents. As a result, arrest and trial records offer glimpses into the implications of the Commune as a women-centered polity. Its potential never fully achieved, this transforming possibility nonetheless took root during the Commune.

Rather than attempting to integrate themselves into male-proffered definitions of republican citizenship, during the Commune working women claimed their equal status by raising their voices, gaining notice of their political presence, and by getting valuable military-associated work done. At times, women argued specifically against male interpretations of their spheres of influence. Noticing working women's disagreements with elected leadership, husbands, National Guardsmen, and male worker counterparts uncovers gendered notions of the Commune's revolution, otherwise less visible. While the Commune lasted, women did not have "only paradoxes to offer" in articulations of equality; perhaps because no formalized right, no legal precedent existed for their inclusion, improvised actions often spoke louder than republican protocol.<sup>23</sup> Significantly, the Commune and its elected leadership needed women's contributions in order to survive day-to-day or longer, as had the Government of National Defense during the siege. Women took advantage of this moment in which male citizens needed them as citizen-defenders of the Commune, sometimes articulating their gendered economic, social, and political rational for its new order. They did not beg for equality, but claimed

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<sup>23</sup> The title, *Only Paradoxes to Offer*, summarizes Scott's analysis of feminist articulations of political equality between 1789 and 1944.

it.<sup>24</sup> In attempting to understand alternatives to the traditional paradox of women's attempts at equality through citizenship, the Commune's short duration matters less than what took place between 18 March and 28 May 1871.

Specifically, women made their demands in street demonstrations, women's organizational meetings, and political clubs meeting in requisitioned churches, sometimes participating in direct democracy. In these efforts, they petitioned and sent delegations to elected officials, wrote in newspapers, and wore red ribbons or sashes in collective demonstrations of their support for the Commune's new order, not merely support for its male officials. They demanded and received space, money, and material necessities for their *Union des femmes*, employment endeavors, hospital services, schools for girls and women, and soup kitchens. Communardes claimed their equality by working at barricades and producing ammunition and other war materiel. They occupied military combat posts, whether officially acceptable or not, and they fought and died in battle throughout, especially during the final "Bloody Week" of the conflict.

Communardes argued that the immediate wartime demands must incorporate women's need for work and education. This position ran counter to Commune leadership's attempts to argue that women's just desires had to remain secondary until the Commune triumphed. For many women of the popular classes, if the Commune were to survive and represent the urban poor and disenfranchised – also the goal of men - they would have their voices heard, their long-denied demands for fair and equal pay and

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<sup>24</sup> For a chronological parallel illuminating disenfranchised women's political influence, despite a lack of suffrage, see, Elsa Barkley Brown, "To Catch the Vision of Freedom: Reconstructing Southern Black Women's Political History, 1865-1880," *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., Vicki L. Ruiz and Ellen Carol DuBois, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 124-146.

education, met. By initiating a reconsideration of the Commune from this vantage point it becomes clear that women asserted themselves in this revolution as redefined public citizens through their speech, labor, demonstrations, and penetration of formal male political structures. They occupied the roles of political players and members of the military, despite male resistance and traditional definitions that had removed them from public, political significance. A society of social justice – the New Order the Commune promised – would include women as full members.

The uniqueness of the Commune as a time of intense transition and immediate social, political, and military change, *and* as an experiment led by an official government elected by universal male suffrage shaped women's opportunities. With men's official electoral declaration of the Commune lagging eight days behind the women-declared insurrection, republican male politicization did not initiate 18 March calls for the new order of the Commune, something significantly under-analyzed. The result was a women-fomented revolution armed against a national government; simultaneously, the revolution's own centralized, representative government held municipal power as of 26 March. Its leadership was not in hiding, but easily accessible to its citizenry, signing paperwork, leaving records. Women took advantage of both the volatility of revolution and its formal organization to press their points. The volatility provided women the ability to spontaneously occupy political space and be heard; everything was vulnerable to sudden change. The upheavals also allowed them to speak publicly on matters of state, participate in acts of direct democracy, and present themselves in military positions, whether or not formal leadership approved. The organization, however, created formal

channels for women's political pressure tactics, making leadership live up to the ideals of the new order and not simply duplicate the old. Women took advantage of the unique timing of the Commune in wide-ranging ways.

Among the bodies of somewhere near 30,000 victims that came to represent the Commune's ultimate outcome, were a large number of women, by some estimates, 6,000 or more.<sup>25</sup> Re-reading the Commune through these deaths also reveals that government troops increasingly targeted women. Long before the Commune, women had come under particular scrutiny by police; later they became the targets of summary executions during the final, "bloody week."<sup>26</sup> Fears of female arsonists heightened troops' antipathy towards communardes; troops' discoveries of female barricade fighters seem to have increased their frustration more generally, perhaps increasing death tolls. Recent feminist historical analysis foregrounding the body emphasizes, "the centrality of bodies – raced, sexed, classed, and ethnicized bodies – [often] as sites through which imperial and colonial power was imagined and exercised."<sup>27</sup> In their recent book, Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton argue that bodies can "dramatize how, why, and under what conditions women and gender can be made visible," given the challenges presented by

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<sup>25</sup> Chapter V analyzes death tolls but specific numbers divided by sex or age remain unclear. However, most every official source and personal account mentions the significant numbers of women's bodies covering the streets during the last week of the battle, as well as their summary executions during that week. Additionally, by all accounts, executions of women as they were marched to prisons were not uncommon.

<sup>26</sup> Indicating that communardes remained under police scrutiny, Carolyn Eichner has recently shown that in the Commune's aftermath, communarde Paule Mink was monitored by police informants through the day of her burial on May Day 1901. As Eichner points out, she may have been monitored prior to the Commune, but pre-Commune police records were destroyed during the fires that culminated its final defense. Carolyn J. Eichner, "'Vive la Commune!': Feminism, Socialism, and Revolutionary Revival in the Aftermath of the 1871 Paris Commune," *Journal of Women's History* 15, no. 4 (Summer 2003): 68-98.

<sup>27</sup> Tony Ballantyne and Antoinette Burton, eds., *Bodies in Contact: Rethinking Colonial Encounters in World History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 6.

source limitations.<sup>28</sup> The “striking” degree to which female bodies have been of utmost concern to authorities across time and space finds a parallel in the records of the siege and Commune era, although formally neither an imperial or colonial location.<sup>29</sup>

The silencing in death of so many women and the anonymity of mass burials contributed to historians’ conclusions that women were marginal in an “unsuccessful” revolution for working-class equality. By 28 May 1871, the bodies of thousands of men littered the streets of Paris, but also the stripped, raped, and/or dead bodies of women.<sup>30</sup> Police records indicate the arrests of thousands of women, the majority during Bloody Week and the following year, with the latest occurring in 1878.<sup>31</sup> If they survived, military trials awaited many, with early defendants receiving judicial penalties that initially included death sentences.<sup>32</sup> Adding to their future invisibility, women’s communarde actions and deaths did not fit idealized expectations of those occupying the gendered category of *women*, leaving some to eliminate them from the sex category of *female*. Writing while the bodies of those deemed communardes still littered the road to Versailles, Alexandre Dumas,  *fils*, expounded, “We will not even call them females

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<sup>28</sup> Ballantyne and Burton, *Bodies in Contact*, 4.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. However, the working classes of Paris assuredly came under similar scrutiny during the height of the French colonial era and since.

<sup>30</sup> In his tallies, Jacques Rougerie did not assess women’s deaths or their disappearance from the workforce. However, evidence hints that perhaps 20% of those killed were women, as discussed in Chapter V. If so, perhaps 6,000 of the approximately 30,000 bodies were those of women. Whatever the precise number, in the Commune’s aftermath, women’s bodies were prevalent in Paris and on the road to Versailles prisons.

<sup>31</sup> Archive de la Préfecture de la Police de Paris (APP) files suggest my estimate, although I have not yet recorded every name, assessing mistakes and duplicates. See especially, APP/Ba365/1-5, Ba366/1, Ba368-369.

<sup>32</sup> Assemblée Nationale, *Enquête parlementaire sur l’Insurrection du 18 Mars*, Tome I-II (Versailles: L’Assemblée Nationale, 1872) offers the total of 1,051 prosecutions of women and this number is most often used in assessing women’s appearances before *Conseils du Guerre*, as well as their sentences. However, that number only reflects those brought before the 4<sup>th</sup> Council of War prior to February 1872. The 4<sup>th</sup> Council continued to prosecute after that date, as did at least three other war councils that tried women, the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 26<sup>th</sup>. Prosecutions occurred through 1878, with amnesty only offered in 1880.

[*femelles*] out of respect for women, whom they resemble only when dead,” thereby justifying death as not only an appropriate penalty, but the only one that might return them to their proper, “natural” state.<sup>33</sup> The use of *femelle* in French is even harsher than the English translation of “female,” as the French version generally connotes only non-human animals; if communardes were neither female nor women, they were not human. At most, their presence could be rendered an insignificant, though horrific, aberration, not a conscious human act relevant to history. The republic of “moral order” that crushed the Commune and the Third Republic that followed, could not accommodate women’s recent revolutionary actions, legally mandating women’s submission within the private sphere. Ironically, while police and other authorities found women quite visible and worthy of their notice, overall, historians have been less attentive. This point becomes clear in the Commune’s historiography.

Literally thousands of books, tracts, articles, and memoirs about the Commune era have appeared in print. Between 1871 and 1971, the much-commemorated centennial of the Paris Commune, women’s presence was chronicled in only one book and probably no more than six scholarly articles appearing in English or French. However, most Commune-era writers mentioned women – often representing them as either fearsome, murdering viragos or courageous, loyal defenders of the republic and liberty, depending on their own ideological position. Commune historian, Jacques Rougerie, noted in 1970 that, “from day to day, they made their revolution,” including women in the pronoun,

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<sup>33</sup> Alexandre Dumas, *Lettres sur les choses de ce jour* (Paris: Michael Lévy Frères, 1871), 16-17.

*ils*.<sup>34</sup> Until quite recently, the assumption that women are apolitical by “nature” and therefore, do not make revolutions, has virtually hidden their relevance during the Commune, as well as the relevance of gender overall. Additionally, most scholars continue to articulate revolution as an end, not a process.<sup>35</sup> Even those who have studied collective uprisings have frequently overlooked women’s contributions, often due to the sources, statistics, and the androcentric theories employed to analyze conflict, revolt, and “people’s” revolutions.<sup>36</sup> Because women and gender were invisible, many of the forces nurturing revolutions became historically and historiographically concealed.<sup>37</sup>

In terms of the historiography of the Paris Commune overall, the early commentaries of Karl Marx and V.I. Lenin on the subject and the substantial post-1917 antipathy towards anything associated with “communism,” centered historical debate and analysis on whether or not the Commune was the last of the European “popular

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<sup>34</sup> Jacques Rougerie, *Procès de Communards* (Paris: Achevé d’imprimer, 1970), 24.

<sup>35</sup> In John Foran’s, *Theorizing Revolutions* (London: Routledge, 1997), the only chapter devoted to “Gender and Revolutions” by Valentine M. Moghadam, essentially defines revolution as a result, not a process, limiting the opportunities to see women’s roles when revolutionary moments pass without permanency. Moghadam disregards process, noting that changes in gender relations are especially obvious in revolutionary outcomes and that there is less evidence thus far to support a role for gender in causality. However, Moghadam tacks on the comment that “it cannot be denied, however, that some revolutionary experiences have been profoundly liberating for women *as women*,” perhaps missing the significance of that point.

<sup>36</sup> Karen Kampwirth, *Women and Guerrilla Movements: Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chiapas, Cuba* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002) for an overview of this challenge. Although some research has addressed collective action, class, and violence in a number of settings, gendered components have generally not received the attention that women’s numerical dominance suggests is possible. For one early example, see Louise A. Tilly and Charles Tilly, eds, *Class Conflict and Collective Action* (London: Sage Publications, 1981) in which one chapter of ten directly assesses women’s lives. However, more recently, Charles Tilly’s, *Social Movements, 1768-2004* (London: Paradigm Publishers, 2004), only briefly notes the existence of Women in Black and a (singular) “women’s rights movement” in its sweeping assessment of over 200 years of “Social Movements.”

<sup>37</sup> In *Women and Guerrilla Movements*, Kampwirth argues that revolution is never gender-free and politely states that gender has likely been overlooked due to analyzing only the success of revolutionary movements; however, within Latin America, she argues, *la revolución* is a period of transformation that can only occur after the guerrillas succeed in seizing the state. The Commune fits this “period of transformation” in significant ways. Focusing prior analysis on single questions about outcome has therefore limited the parameters and reduced women’s participation to the footnotes.



uprisings” of the early-modern era or the first “dictatorship of the proletariat” of a modern, industrialized era.<sup>38</sup> The application of Marxist theory to the field of history, especially in the United States and Europe in the 1960s, also contributed to this interest. Still, questions limited to the class-based goals of male participants continued to be the primary subject at the conferences marking the centennial of the Commune in 1971. Only one article by Eugene Schulkind in 1950, coupled with Edith Thomas’ 1963 book, *Les “Pétroleuses,”* made Commune women subjects of Marxist analysis. Both works preceded later Marxist feminist scholars in noticing that improvements in women’s situations “did not necessarily come through proletarian revolution.”<sup>39</sup> That gender intersected with class did not frame the debates in this period.

Schulkind’s 1950 study suggested, but did not fully argue, that women’s participation in the Commune indicated their awareness of their gendered class status as women.<sup>40</sup> Schulkind’s “view from the left,” from which he analyzed the Commune and communardes, opened the door for those interested in pursuing this line of research, although without results.<sup>41</sup> However, he was the first to comprehend that women’s participation could not be reduced to, or subsumed under, male revolutionary actions.

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<sup>38</sup> Karl Marx and V.I. Lenin, *Civil War in France: The Paris Commune* (New York: International Publishers, 1985) and Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Writings on the Paris Commune*, Hal Draper, ed. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971); Eugene Kamenka, ed., *Paradigm for Revolution? The Paris Commune 1871-1971* (Canberra, Australia: Australian National University Press, 1972).

<sup>39</sup> Eugene Schulkind, “Le rôle des femmes dans la Commune de 1871,” *1848: Revue des révolutions contemporaines* XLII, 185 (February 1950): 15-29. Edith Thomas, *Les ‘Pétroleuses’* (Paris: Gaillard, 1963), 8. The English version, translated by James and Starr Atkinson, as *The Woman Incendiaries* (New York: George Braziller, 1966), does not well-translate the epithet of “*pétroleuse*.”

<sup>40</sup> Although not associated with later materialist feminists, Schulkind’s significant point predates theory assessing women as a class, rather than women as a subcomponent of (male) class categories.

<sup>41</sup> Eugene Schulkind, ed., *The Paris Commune of 1871: A View From the Left* (New York: Grove Press, 1974).

Edith Thomas', *Les "Pétroleuses,"* assessed women's roles in the uprising from a Marxist perspective, though primarily offered biographical sketches.<sup>42</sup> Thomas perceived that "women had not written the history of [the Commune] or of themselves in the Paris Commune; they had only been written about as victims of confederates."<sup>43</sup> Thomas' book conforms to the model of early women's history – showing that "women were there too" – but she accomplished more. She wrote, "The history of half the human species, then, which has almost always been enacted on the fringes of History, raises its own questions, peculiar to itself." For her, the "secret thread" running through the work of women writers – including hers – was that all demanded, "that women be considered as human beings."<sup>44</sup>

Thomas demonstrated that both anti- and pro-Commune men were aware of women's involvement. Although not able to answer these questions more broadly, she asked, "Who were these women? What did they do? What did they want? What did they think? Were the "*pétroleuses*" a myth or a reality?" Her study argued that, "All of these questions demand the historian's attention," though she often incorrectly assumed

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<sup>42</sup> With this book, Edith Thomas, as an avowed communist and resistance fighter during World War II, began to confront the omission of women from Marxist and class analysis more generally. The absence of women from working-class narratives and analysis is now especially notable in E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon, 1964), but served as the impetus for more recent works by women's historians, including Sonya O. Rose's *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1992); Anna Clark's *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley: University of California, 1995); Laura Levine Frader and Sonya O. Rose, *Gender and Class in Modern Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1996), and most recently, Rachel G. Fuchs, *Gender and Poverty in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>43</sup> Thomas, *Les 'Pétroleuses'*, 7.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, xii. Perhaps demonstrating Thomas's kinship with the Commune more precisely, *communarde*, André Léo (Léodile Champsieux) wrote in *Le Droit des femmes* in 1869, "The history of women is that of humanity."

women's interests followed men's.<sup>45</sup> Thomas turned the pejorative of "*pétroleuse*" into a Trojan horse, revealing gendered uses of language and history that kept communardes hidden in the assessments of the Commune.<sup>46</sup> However, a number of analytical challenges interfered with her ability to produce the more holistic view of events she sought.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, her book supplies only an introduction to a few of the names and actions of so many women; most significantly, it took thirty-three years for another book-length study. Overall, the value of the work of Thomas and her contemporaries is that they flagged women's participation as a fascinating topic for future research.<sup>48</sup>

By the late 1970s, English translations of Thomas's book and the accounts of a few other women - including legendary communarde, Louise Michel - began to appear, though with little analysis or commentary.<sup>49</sup> Eugene Schulkind's, "Socialist Women

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., xiii.

<sup>46</sup> Monique Wittig, in "The Trojan Horse," argues that words can provide a shock, allowing familiar words to harness the power of a war machine, unexpectedly surprising readers so that they see "all the elaboration that was hidden at first under a brutal coarseness." *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (Boston: Beacon, 1992), 68.

<sup>47</sup> Like Nancy Fraser's, *Unruly Practices*, Thomas clearly situates her work as a political tool; as such, theoretical and historical analysis must remain connected to one's personal analysis of the world and their place in it. Thomas, a communist, and without the benefit of later Women's History theory, wrote that what allowed her "to understand the women of the Commune is that during the Resistance, [she] took part in the coordinating committee of the *Union des Femmes Françaises*, edited their tracts, and helped them to plan the women's demonstrations against the Vichy government and the Nazi occupation; the barricades of 1944 replied to the barricades of 1871."

<sup>48</sup> Although there may be a very few unaccounted for here, the additional articles are, Vassili Soukhomline, "Deux Femmes Russes Combattantes de la Commune," *Cahiers internationaux; revue internationale du monde du travail* 16 (May 1950): 53-62; P. Tchérédnitchenko, "La vie génèreuse et mouvementée d'Élisa Tomanavskaïa qui fut blessée sur les barricades de la Commune," *Études Soviétique*, 87 (Juin 1955) (not very reliable with a clear cold war agenda, but interesting nonetheless); Marie-Thérèse Eyquem, "Les femmes au service de la Commune," *Voix l'aube: l'immortelle Commune de Paris*. Colloque scientifique international organisé par l'Institut Maurice Thorez (6-9 May, 1971) (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1971): 326-333; and Marguerite Thibert, "Portraits des femmes de la Commune," *Voici l'aube l'immortelle Commune de Paris*. Colloque scientifique international organisé par l'Institut Maurice Thorez (6-9 May, 1971) (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1971).

<sup>49</sup> Due to the attention paid to Louise Michel, I have intentionally deemphasized her in my dissertation, although she appears on occasion. In addition to, *The Women Incendiaries*, for examples of this trend see, Edith Thomas, *Louise Michel*, trans. Penelope Williams (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1980); Bullitt

During the 1871 Paris Commune” in 1985 brought the *Union des femmes pour la défense de Paris et les soins aux blessés*, the Commune’s formal women’s organization, to the attention of historians, noting that much research remained.<sup>50</sup> Discussing women’s historiographical invisibility, Schulkind argued that the attitudes of “women during the Paris Commune form a far more complex subject than one would conclude from a century of histories.”<sup>51</sup> He criticized the tendency of analyzing only particular sets of archival records, which excluded many sources indicating women’s involvement.<sup>52</sup> With this, Schulkind summarized the overall historiography of the 1871 Paris Commune through the 1980s, which had further erased the significance of women’s activities in the streets of Paris, even if it had not obliterated their presence altogether. With the next two decades, women’s history and gender analysis proved especially valuable, enabling scholars to contribute a few articles and two books about women and gender during the Commune.

Responding both to Schulkind and Thomas, Kathleen Jones and Françoise Vergès re-posed many significant questions, suggesting paths for future research in their articles from the early 1990s.<sup>53</sup> They challenged researchers to take communarde archival records and viewpoints seriously as subjects in themselves, not just as addendums to male

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Lowry and Elizabeth Ellington Gunter, eds., *The Red Virgin: Memoirs of Louise Michel* (University, Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1981); Victorine Brocher, *Souvenirs d’une morte vivante*; and Louis Constant, *Mémoires de Femmes Mémoire du peuple* (Paris: François Maspero, 1979).

<sup>50</sup> Eugene Schulkind, “Socialist Women During the 1871 Paris Commune,” *Past and Present*, No. 106 (Feb 1985): 124-163.

<sup>51</sup> Schulkind, “Socialist Women,” 124.

<sup>52</sup> As of 1985, Schulkind noted that this methodology had continued to limit women’s visibility to only about 285 of the 700 women he had identified, and to only 60 of the 311 he had associated with the Commune’s *Union des femmes*. “Socialist Women,” 126-129. Though an incomplete survey, the research for this dissertation has uncovered the names of over 2,000 women.

<sup>53</sup> Kathleen Jones and Françoise Vergès, “Women of the Paris Commune,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 14, No. 5 (1991): 491-503; and “‘Aux Citoyennes!’.

action. They suggested that communardes were acting as citizens on their own terms, despite their lack of – perhaps even resistance to – suffrage. Jones and Vergès argued that, “the women of the Commune took action and perceived themselves as possessing the collective power to radically transform daily life and public space.”<sup>54</sup> These articles issued calls for deeper research into women’s political and military participation. As Jones and Vergès were challenging scholars to renew their interest in communardes, a 1991 article, then 1996 book, by Gay L. Gullickson analyzed gendered representations of the Commune.<sup>55</sup>

In her book, *The Unruly Women of Paris: Images of the Commune*, Gullickson assesses the gendered nature of political symbols, focusing on the representations of the 1871 Paris Commune produced by both supporters and detractors. As a cultural history, *Unruly Women* uses women’s words and actions to show the nineteenth-century creation of gendered symbols, caricatures, and other depictions of the Commune and its participants. Gullickson’s primary focus, however, was not women as historical actors. The subtitle, *Images of the Commune*, better indicates the archival and analytical interest. However, gendering a “rereading [of] the Commune,” as Gullickson suggests, reveals how historical assessments of class consciousness continued to center around male perspectives and analysis until more recent feminist investigation, as Jones and Vergès also argued.<sup>56</sup> This emphasis on male politicization inhibited an assessment of whether women’s Commune activities reflected men’s goals. Gullickson’s analytically discrete

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<sup>54</sup> Jones/Vergès, “Women of the Paris Commune,” 492-3.

<sup>55</sup> Gay L. Gullickson, “*La Pétroleuse*: Representing Revolution,” *Feminist Studies* 17/2 (Summer 1991): 240-263; *The Unruly Women of Paris: Images of the Commune* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1996).

<sup>56</sup> The title of Gullickson’s introduction in *Unruly Women* is, “Rereading the Commune.”

chapters and attention to gendered representations obscure a sharp focus on communardes themselves, for which Jones, Vergès, and their predecessors called. The same year that Gullickson published *Unruly Women*, a lone chapter from Martin Johnson's, *Paradise of Association: Political Culture and Popular Organizations in the Paris Commune of 1871* addressed women's participation in events.

While Johnson's chapter states that the "existence of armed women's groups has long been known in a piecemeal manner" and therefore, "the extent and implications of their activity merit systematic investigation," he does not do it.<sup>57</sup> His single article on gendered collective memory of the Commune does not address this point either.<sup>58</sup> Rather, he proposes that, "the novelty inherent in the identity of *citoyenne* was bound up with armed defense of the revolution. Weapons in the hands of women both symbolized and actualized the power of *citoyennes* over non-citizens," something to which Jones and Vergès had alluded.<sup>59</sup> He states his structural gender analysis more clearly by adding, "women's devotion to the Commune could make them *citoyennes*, but not fully *citoyens*"; Johnson does not analyze whether women themselves grasped this division between primary and secondary citizenship, and if so, what they did to change it.<sup>60</sup> Though not developed in the chapter, Johnson understands that for women, "adopting a revolutionary approach generally required accepting a larger view of revolution than that encompassed in the revolutionary tradition, a tradition that rendered women themselves

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<sup>57</sup> Martin P. Johnson, *The Paradise of Association: Political Culture and Popular Organizations in the Paris Commune of 1871* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1996), 235 (footnote 2).

<sup>58</sup> Martin P. Johnson, "Memory and the Cult of Revolution in the 1871 Paris Commune," *Journal of Women's History* 9, No. 1 (Spring 1997): 39-57.

<sup>59</sup> Johnson, *The Paradise of Association*, 266.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 269.

nearly invisible and also emphasized political and civil changes that often did not apply to them.”<sup>61</sup> Therefore, understanding women’s contributions to this revolution requires a primary concern with women’s experiences, centering them at the hub of analysis.

Gullickson’s argument that the image of the *pétroleuse* reflected men’s sexual anxiety proves challenging to Johnson. He argues instead that “the horror of armed women was based less on numbers [which, for Johnson, incites the male “sexual anxiety” of which Gullickson writes] than on their transgression of gender boundaries . . . The disfigurement of Commune women into wild-eyed *pétroleuses* . . . functioned to defuse the explosive reality of women bearing weapons and using them for political purposes.”<sup>62</sup> Gullickson’s argument relative to the provocation of men’s sexual anxiety, however, involves more than numbers. Analyzing visual images depicting “wild-eyed viragoes” and “the daughters of the she-wolves of 1793,” Gullickson writes a history of the *mentalités* that, for the author, reveal men’s sexual anxiety about women’s violations of their “natural” roles, somewhat irrespective of numbers.<sup>63</sup> My research shows numbers, transgression of gender boundaries, and women’s political purposes are relevant, though Johnson misses the intersection of their points. That is, this sexual anxiety of men of the “moral order” that Gullickson analyzes, was directed at women acting with political purposes, willing to use weapons to achieve them. Alexandre Dumas, *fils* demonstrated the nexus of the points when he categorized the large number of communardes as “women, only when dead,” due to their “unnatural” words and actions. If women, by

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 265.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 269.

<sup>63</sup> Gullickson, *Unruly Women*, 206, 10.

definition, could not be political, but clearly some women were, what sex were they? As Johnson admits, the chapter was a limited attempt to suggest an armed communaire presence disrupted political culture and popular organizing overall, in which he is correct. The focus of his book, however, remains on male political culture and popular organizing.

Responding to Marxist analysis of the Commune while still prioritizing male political culture and organizing, Roger V. Gould argued in 1995 that 1871 was “not about work at all,” but “municipal autonomy, rather than the right to work.”<sup>64</sup> However, women’s lives – and their numerical prominence in waged work - are not significantly included in the analysis leading to that conclusion. That women often earned less than half men’s wages, faced competition from convents, and had been especially harmed by the economic devastation of the siege does not receive attention, leading to his conclusions. Additionally, the subject of municipal autonomy, when articulated in the more traditional terms of universal male suffrage, omits women. Without centering women’s experiences, a conclusion that the Commune was “not about work at all” is premature. The problem is not a lack of sources, but a lack of questions rendering women’s perspectives and contributions more visible.

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<sup>64</sup> Roger V. Gould, *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community, and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995), 197. See also his articles, “Multiple Networks and Mobilization in the Paris Commune, 1871,” *American Sociological Review* 56 (December 1991): 716-729; and “Trade Cohesion, Class Unity, and Urban Insurrection: Artisanal Activism in the Paris Commune,” *American Journal of Sociology* 98, No. 4 (January 1993): 721-54.



In 1997, two chapters of *Femmes de la Cité 1815-1871*, analyzed women's Commune-era activities.<sup>65</sup> The first, by Alain Dalotel, describes women's place in the *clubs rouges* during the siege of 1870-1871.<sup>66</sup> He concludes that women's place in these clubs has been left "in the shadows."<sup>67</sup> Dalotel states that even if *clubistes* possibly had but little influence in 1871, and more significantly, if many have preferred to forget them, "it is perhaps above all because of the incomprehension and fear of the men who created the Moral Order which was established after the Commune."<sup>68</sup> While this statement reflects the historiographical perspectives of the immediate post-Commune era, it also points to the challenges of using these same male perspectives as the basis for later historical analysis. Additionally, a determination of their "little influence" is problematic unless one uses only the formal Commune government as the locus for that influence, and even that is so-far speculative at best.

In the same book, Manuel Diatkine discusses the dichotomized public- and private-life of women during the siege, offering examples of women who, like men, were "*acteurs de l'histoire*" and could also "*faire l'histoire*."<sup>69</sup> His overarching argument is that bourgeois "feminine roles conforming to established values offer some opportunities for participation in the public sphere, which are not unimportant."<sup>70</sup> In the chapter, Diatkine suggests that for middle-class women during the siege, "feminine roles" such as

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<sup>65</sup> Alain Corbin, Jacqueline Lalouette, and Michèle Riot-Sarcey, *Femmes de la Cité 1815-1871* (Grâne: Creaphis, 1997).

<sup>66</sup> Dalotel, "Les femmes dans les clubs rouges 1870-1871," in *Femmes de la Cité*.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 293.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 302.

<sup>69</sup> Diatkine, "Vie privée et vie publique des femmes durant le siège de Paris 1870-1871," *Femmes de la Cité*.

<sup>70</sup> Diatkine, "Vie privé et vie public," 306.

Red Cross, cantine, and other charitable work, associated women with a political and military action of their nation, calling on their rhetorical positions as public *citoyennes*. Diatkine, however, does not assess the women who already worked within the traditional, geographical public sphere – those of the poorer classes - and who now increased their own rhetoric and presence during the siege. He also does not analyze the difference between “rhetorical positions as *citoyennes*” and those of *citoyens*, the importance of which Martin Johnson had signaled. Neither is it Diatkine’s intent to question whether the expanding access of middle-class women to public arenas continued – or increased – during the Commune. These authors drew upon previous scholarly articles and siege-era commentary, but go no further. Though not groundbreaking, both chapters paid attention to the presence of women in these events.

Despite the names of thousands of women associated with the Commune in archival and published sources, in 1999, Commune historian, Robert Tombs, wrote off women’s collective participation as that of an “activist minority” of “less than 100.”<sup>71</sup> He includes women as a subcomponent of one chapter in the book, *The Paris Commune 1871*. Tombs asserts that this small group included only the single or widowed women without dependents, those with associations to radical menfolk, or who had “exceptional personalities.”<sup>72</sup> He argues that women, therefore, were “extremely underrepresented in revolutionary organizations.”<sup>73</sup> This position discounts the existence of the *Union des femmes*, which was arguably the best-organized, most productive revolutionary

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<sup>71</sup> Robert Tombs, *The Paris Commune 1871* (London: Longman, 1999), 142. Tombs is responding to David Barry’s argument about this “activist minority” in, *Women and Political Insurgency: France in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 119.

<sup>72</sup> Tombs, *The Paris Commune 1871*, 142.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

organization of the Commune.<sup>74</sup> Significantly, in post-siege Paris the numbers of women who were single, widowed, without minor dependants, associated with “radical” men, or who had “exceptional personalities” – however defined – vastly outnumbered the 100 he acknowledges.<sup>75</sup> Research for this dissertation reveals substantially more women who came to the attention of other women as they participated in wide-ranging activities during the Commune, and who came to the attention of police, military officials, and other male observers.<sup>76</sup> Employing a methodology that gleans all references to women, contradicts the notion that women were an exceptional or occasional presence in this revolution.

In a separate book, Tombs unwittingly contributes to the invisibility of women’s agency in events.<sup>77</sup> As one example, he discussed “the people of Paris, who had assumed the right to speak for France,” and the problems this caused for both the Prussian, and

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<sup>74</sup> Eugene Schulkind called the *Union des femmes*, “the largest and most influential organization among the population of Paris during the Commune,” with similar organization not reappearing until “well into the twentieth century.” “Socialist Women During the 1871 Paris Commune,” 156.

<sup>75</sup> After reducing women’s significance in this manner, Tombs easily concludes that, “it can hardly now be said, after the research of recent years, that the history of Commune women has been neglected.”

<sup>76</sup> The methodology of surveying records for women’s participation reveals many unnamed women, in addition to those less prominent or “unknown.” Paraphrasing communard historian Jacques Rougerie, Le Musée d’art et d’histoire de Saint-Denis (MSD) also prioritizes this point, often mentioned but rarely analyzed. Though women are not the privileged subject in its ongoing Commune exhibition, narrative 13 announces, “*Communards* and *communardes* [were] above all, for the vast majority, the obscure, the unknowns, or those ‘without voice’ among [Parisian workers] . . . often . . . virtually illiterate.” This status of “unknown,” however, does not necessarily relegate their significance to obscurity, as Tombs’ analysis suggests.

<sup>77</sup> As the term, “agency,” rises from male-oriented analysis, the means of exerting power or influence are often gendered, obscuring an inclusion of women as more influential agents in the Commune than Tombs and others have previously acknowledged. I assume women’s ability to exert power and influence, to include themselves as “persons” or part of *le peuple*, though I offer evidence demonstrating that women did likewise. However, my assumption allows the historian to notice individual women’s agency, then critique how and why they exert it, and at times, if they appear to have a consciousness of it.

eventually, the French Republic governments.<sup>78</sup> He later adds that, “the resulting massacre [repressing the Commune] was the worst seen in Europe between the French and Russian Revolutions,” describing how French government leaders justified the slaughter.<sup>79</sup> However, his analysis does not address women as an integrated part of “the people of Paris” or “the resulting massacre.”

Entitled, “Warriors and Killers: Women and Violence During the Paris Commune, 1871,” a final article by Tombs addresses categories of female violence.<sup>80</sup> He challenges some of the hypotheses of Martin Johnson, particularly his view that women in the Commune “undermined the central assumption...that only men could be warriors” and that these actions constituted a conscious claim to equal citizenship.<sup>81</sup> My research shows that communardes did not undermine the assumptions about male-only warriors, even though female warriors existed. If anything, the existence of female military personnel and unofficial arms-carrying women focused Republic leaders on the impossibility of legitimizing female warriors or guerrillas by imbuing them with citizenship, as the earlier quote by Alexandre Dumas, *filis* suggests.<sup>82</sup> However, that is

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<sup>78</sup> Robert Tombs, “The Wars Against Paris,” in *On the Road to Total War: The American Civil War and the German Wars of Unification, 1861-1871*, eds., Stig Förster and Jörg Nagler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 542-3.

<sup>79</sup> Tombs, “The Wars Against Paris,” 554. As this chapter addresses “total war” in particular, women’s absence is especially noticeable.

<sup>80</sup> Robert Tombs, “Warriors and Killers: Women and Violence During the Paris Commune, 1871,” *The Sphinx in the Tuileries and Other Essays in Modern French History; Papers Presented at the Eleventh George Rude Seminar*, eds., Robert Aldrich and Martyn Lyons (Sydney: University of Sydney, 1999), 169-182. Although Tombs’ use of the term, “violence,” is limited to killing, especially during a war, this dissertation employs the term more broadly, indicating physical force against person or property. Vehement language, especially when threatening violence, may also be included.

<sup>81</sup> Tombs, “Warriors and Killers,” 170.

<sup>82</sup> Bertrand Taihe, *Citizenship and Wars: France in Turmoil 1870-71* (London: Routledge, 2001), 122, notes that, “the age qualification for active citizenship could be challenged and extended to include male children as young as 9 or 10 and older men, but the gender qualification proved more resilient.”

not Tombs' perspective. Contrary to Tombs, but similar to Jones and Vergès, Johnson attempted to expand the definition of women's "political" activity beyond the traditional boundaries of voting and other formal demonstrations of political power; however, Tombs parallels previous historians in discounting women's political significance during the Commune.<sup>83</sup> I have found no references to women discussing suffrage during the Commune or the months preceding it. This does not mean women did not want equal citizenship or other aspects of equality. Limiting the political goals of communardes' to voting has contributed to their invisibility.

Tombs discounts part of the work of Jones and Vergès, arguing against a component of what he terms the "recent strong thesis consensus," that "women's violence [in the Commune was] unprecedented in motivation, consciousness, scale and ambition."<sup>84</sup> However, Tombs offers no scope of comparison validating his claim. What Tombs appears to be saying overall, is that women's participation in the Commune was not necessarily especially violent or historically unique, nor did they demand equal citizenship "in the far more central arena of political choice and decision," again

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<sup>83</sup> James F. McMillan's, *France and Women 1789-1914: Gender, Society and Politics* (New York: Routledge, 2000) omits mention of the Commune and whatever influence communardes had on "gender, society, and politics" before 1914. Darline Gay Levy, Harriet Branson Applewhite, and Mary Durham Johnson, in, *Women in Revolutionary Paris 1789-1795* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1979) argue that women learned to use political institutions, the revolutionary press, and oral political communications in Paris during the Revolution, although they never voted. For a brief extension of similar arguments to the Commune, see David Barry's, "The Commune of 1871: the Great Venture in Female Citizenship," in *Women and Political Insurgency: France in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996). Although analyzing how male republicans rhetorically and legally limited women's citizenship during the French Revolution, and less what women wanted, see William H. Sewell Jr., "Le citoyen/la citoyenne: Activity, Passivity, and the Revolutionary Concept of Citizenship," *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture, Vol 2: The Political Culture of the French Revolution*, ed. Colin Lucas (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1988).

<sup>84</sup> Tombs, "Warriors and Killers," 170.

minimizing their visibility and determining women's value by men's political priorities.<sup>85</sup>

As opposed to Gullickson, Johnson, and Jones and Vergès, Tombs does not elaborate as to whether those in 1871 thought these women especially violent, given the contemporary ideology that men held a monopoly over violence.

Lastly, in his assessment of women's military participation, Tombs admits that, "women were indeed omnipresent in the fighting," but he does not fully integrate gender analysis with its many complexities.<sup>86</sup> He prioritizes suffrage-based citizenship as the "far more central arena" of these women's struggle for equality and offers his "non-gendered analysis" of a woman's actions, saying she "was acting not as a woman, but as a [National Guard] leader." However, gender analysis reveals the intersection of those acts as paramount, if for many in 1871, impossible. These examples reveal a misunderstanding of gender analysis and the conclusions it alters. However, overall Tombs' scholarship on the Commune and its era has demonstrated consistent quality in its arguments, clarity, and contributions to the field, if not in its assessments of women's participation.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 171-2, 182.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 170. This conclusion seems to contradict his claim that only an "activist minority" took part in events. Most recently, David A. Shafer's, *The Paris Commune* (New York: Palgrave, 2005) contributes no gender analysis of events, though one chapter, "Women in the Commune," discusses women. However, as with the book as a whole, this chapter primarily retreads secondary scholarship – much of it decades old – including only snippets of women's experiences, many taken from secondary sources. Terms such as voters, republicans, insurgents, Parisians, siege survivors, and National Guards remain unanalyzed as universally male, with that point never mentioned.

<sup>87</sup> In addition to those mentioned, see Robert Tombs, *The War Against Paris 1871* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); "Harbingers or Entrepreneurs? A Workers' Cooperative During the Paris Commune," *The Historical Journal* 27, Vol. 4 (Dec., 1984): 969-977; Robert Tombs and J.P.T. Bury, *Thiers 1797-1877: A Political Life* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986); Tombs, ed., *Nationhood and Nationalism in France : From Boulangism to the Great War* (London: Harper Collins, 1991); and "The Wars Against Paris" (1997).

The most recent contribution, Carolyn Eichner's, *Surmounting the Barricades: Women in the Paris Commune*, addresses the significant topic of "feminist socialisms" during the Commune with particular attention paid to three prominent women: André Léo (Léodile Champsieux), Elisabeth Dmitrieff, and Paule Mink.<sup>88</sup> After Louise Michel, these three communardes have attracted the most scholarly attention. Responding to the calls of Jones and Vergès, Eichner uses Dmitrieff, Léo, and Mink to analyze women's labor, social status, and club participation, respectively. Eichner "illuminates the breadth, depth, and impact of feminist socialisms both within the Paris Commune of 1871 and, in its aftermath, *fin-de-siècle* gender and class politics."<sup>89</sup> Her work challenges the normative trajectory of French feminism, which tends to "begin" in either 1873 or 1876.<sup>90</sup> She also argues that noticing feminist contributions to socialist goals during the Commune allows for better analysis of the broader relationship between these ideologies. As had Thomas, Eichner notes that, "the existing historiography presents a limited and incomplete understanding of...communarde ideas and actions."<sup>91</sup> Eichner rightly argues for their inclusion and importance for the histories of both feminism and socialism. Eichner successfully demonstrates the fruits of utilizing these women's abundant archival records, which had previously remained all but invisible within the historiography. Her

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<sup>88</sup> Carolyn Eichner, *Surmounting the Barricades: Women in the Paris Commune* (Bloomington: Indiana, University of Indiana Press, 2004).

<sup>89</sup> Eichner, *Surmounting the Barricades*, 2.

<sup>90</sup> The attention paid to feminisms in Eichner's book assists in the rewriting of the trajectory of French feminism more generally. Claire Moses, in *French Feminism in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, noted the significance of a cycle of feminist assertions, then violent repression of women, within the long 19<sup>th</sup> century in France, creating a different pattern for women's civil rights than in the Anglo-American context. Susan Barrows argues that French feminism went into a virtual eclipse following the Commune. *Distorting Mirrors: Visions of the Crowd in Late Nineteenth-Century France* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981), 49. Eichner's work addresses both points, contributing insight into the significance of communarde narratives more generally.

<sup>91</sup> Eichner, *Surmounting the Barricades*, 3.

book spotlights the historical significance of three communardes during the Commune and later decades. Nonetheless, her work only hints at the broader contributions of thousands of women who Mink, Léo, and Dmitrieff in some ways represent.

Scholarship on the Commune, therefore, has created a narrative of the Commune, in which women's participation became overwritten by gendered perceptions of politics and militarism, denying women's political or military activities as ipso facto political or military. Male political, economic, and social ideas and experiences came to represent the revolution as a whole and the sum of the experiences and ideas of Commune participation by *le peuple*. Female militarism, as one component of female political action within a revolution, destabilized definitions of political, military, and militant; however, after the fighting was over, male political and military actors reestablished "moral order," partly by prosecuting broadly-defined political or military acts exhibited by women during the Commune. Authorities used testimony about women's siege- and Commune-era words, political expressions, and military associations to judge them. A neat divide arose: an armed woman defender during the siege was patriotic, during the Commune, criminal. That many women of the popular classes viewed their siege-era goals and their participation in the revolutionary Commune as consistent became unrecognizable. For some of those women, the link between the siege and the Commune was the opportunity both provided to confront the inequalities affecting their lives, in particular, the roles men of all classes played in their subjugation. Ignoring this link contributes to a narrative of women's oppression that suggests women have not fought



back against their oppressors, but accepted sex-based oppression as somehow in their own interests. The Commune is a moment revealing that to be false.

Although Robert Tombs summarizes his view of the historiography of this subject as, “it can hardly be said, after the research of recent years, that the history of Commune women has been neglected,” I disagree.<sup>92</sup> I argue that the limited work done in the intervening years since Thomas’ book has been significant but has not tapped the full richness and importance of her original questions and their answers, and those of Jones and Vergès since. The history of the Commune as representing the interest of the masses demands a tally of and inquiry into the lives of more than a few individuals.

Presently, bringing to light women’s roles during the Commune includes on-going development of a database that currently includes the names of approximately 2,000 women thus far culled from six Parisian archives, as well as an archive in Amsterdam and another at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois.<sup>93</sup> In addition to

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<sup>92</sup> Tombs, *The Paris Commune 1871*, 143. Engraining this oversight further, is Bertrand Taithe’s 2001 comment in his chapter on “Odd Citizens: Veterans and Children of the War,” *Citizenship and Wars: France in Turmoil: 1870-1871* (London: Routledge), 117. He segues into the chapter with the comment that, “the revolutionary legend has recently focused more on the women of the Commune because gender historians, feminists, and socialists could reclaim these women in the grand narrative of their struggle for gender equality” - a “reclamation” that includes only one book – Eichner’s – which actually integrates those components to any degree.

<sup>93</sup> The collection of this database is an ongoing project, which I do not consider conclusive at this time. However, as this dissertation will demonstrate, the simple tallying of so many, previously invisible, women already alters prior assumptions about women’s visibility, the attention paid them by police and military officials, their contributions during events, death tolls, as well as the overall historical significance of the Commune. All entries include a family name of some sort from a source that clearly indicates the name belongs to a woman. Where possible, the other three dozen columns in the database include birth names, a taken or “known as” name; whether or not they were born in Paris; age; birth dates and death dates; whether they were single, married, widowed, or divorced (these can overlap); which archive(s) or other sources mention them (I include multiple references); whether the woman was mentioned as having participated in a club, as a cantinière, municipal or National Guard ambulancière, on a cannon boat in the Seine, on a barricade, as a pointeuse, or in the Union of Women; a woman’s professed or assigned profession; their arrest date; which, if any, war council they appeared before, clemency date, sentencing comments; and sections for comments on each sheet.

published sources, relevant notations by and about women have been located in the Archives Historiques de la Guerre (AHG), Vincennes, Paris; Archives Nationale (AN); Archive de la Préfecture de la Police de Paris (APP); Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris (BHVP); Bibliothèque Marguarite Durand (BMD); and Bibliothèque Nationale (BN). I have also analyzed documents from the International Institute for Social History (IISH) in Amsterdam, The Netherlands; and the Charles Deering McCormick Special Collections Library at Northwestern University (NWU) in Evanston, Illinois.

Supplementary documentation comes from Le Musée d'art et d'histoire de Saint-Denis (MSD). Not all women represent themselves equally in the record. As such, I have located, then extracted *any* women's names and information regarding women as I investigate archival fonds, rather than focusing on the records of particular communardes who appear more visibly and consistently in the archival or published reservoir.

Ultimately this approach avoids the limitations Schulkind advised against and responds to Jones and Vergès's call to reassess a full range of archival and primary source offerings. Much work remains.

Commune-era sources relevant to women remain widely scattered, incomplete, and often ignored.<sup>94</sup> This research includes a methodology employed by historians of topics widely divergent from 1871 communardes and addressing the formidable task – and creative challenge – of inconsistent and suppressed records. I have used as many

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<sup>94</sup> Jacques Rougerie's work continues to be the most thorough in its assessment of the body of archival sources, although he does not address women's participation in particular and mining for sources relevant to women is a greater challenge than even his work suggests. His *Procès de Communards* (Paris: Achevé d'imprimer, 1970) and "Composition d'une population insurgée" focus primarily on AHG files, especially the sous-série Ly, although give an overview of the sketchier AN series BB24 (dossiers des grâces) and the APP series BA.

*types* of texts as possible, refocusing on the landscape of, in this case, women's lives.<sup>95</sup>

Previously, at least one author has attempted to paint a picture of the Commune, using the letters and other writings and images created by those who were present between the dates covered in this work.<sup>96</sup> My preliminary ethnographic approach similarly has, "as far as possible . . . left [in this case, the women] to write the narrative" of their lives.<sup>97</sup> To this end, I seek out the women - their names; their faces; their voices shouting, whispering, swearing; their bodies occupying pulpits, National Guard uniforms, the streets, the barricades, prisons, and photographs; their recorded words at trial, in requests for pardons, letters; their supposed words - in whatever form or source I can locate them, and try discovering what they did, and, when they allow, why. When the specific subjects of questions and historical analysis, women became quite visible within the Commune era and its surviving records. Memoirs of women participants and women living in Paris during events offer valuable contributions.

As with Victorine Malenfant Rouchy, women's published and unpublished memoirs and letters offer evidence detailing their lives between 4 September 1870 and 28 May 1871. The memoirs used in this dissertation, however, have not generously contributed to prior narratives of the Commune, if they have contributed at all. Archival documents relevant to women, including arrest, prison, trial, sentencing, and clemency records, create a more complete picture of women's experiences and of the attention paid

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<sup>95</sup> Kathryn Babayan's, *Mystics, Monarchs, and Messiahs: Cultural Landscapes of Early Modern Iran* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), xxvii-xxviii, in particular, and the book more generally, for one example of the usefulness and validity of this approach.

<sup>96</sup> Joanna Richardson, ed. and trans., *Paris Under Siege: A Journal of the Events of 1870-1871 Kept by Contemporaries and Translated and Presented by Joanna Richardson* (London: The Folio Society, 1982).

<sup>97</sup> Richardson, *Paris Under Siege*, 9.

to women by men during events. Photographs and drawings of women offer an additional component of analysis, although blatantly iconic representations and caricatures are not included.<sup>98</sup> A few key Parisian Commune newspapers, as well as announcements posted around Paris between the declaration of the Republic and the demise of the Commune provide additional evidence of women's writing and government calls for women's support. At times, published and unpublished accounts of police, priests, or bourgeois men who paid attention to various aspects of women's activities round out the sources.<sup>99</sup> Used in tandem with women's words, and in conjunction with other sources more generally, men's observations provide additional data for understanding women's collective significance. Overall, the sources used here do not represent a complete archival survey; however, they all include names, descriptions, photos, or other mention of individual women or women more generally.

This social history synthesizes methodological contributions from those who have evaluated history from three (overlapping) perspectives. The first includes analysis of colonized, racialized, and gendered people in geographical areas and eras often far removed from 1871 Paris.<sup>100</sup> This method puts formerly marginal subjects at the center

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<sup>98</sup> Gullickson's, *Unruly Women* well-covers these.

<sup>99</sup> Literate men of various social classes who did write about women, did not all do so for the same reasons; collectively, however, they demonstrate not only the range of women's participation, but the amount of attention men paid them.

<sup>100</sup> These approaches include those developed by James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale, 1985) and *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale, 1990); Joan Wallach Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," in *Feminism and History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Chandra Mohanty, "Cartographies of Struggle," in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1991); Leisa D. Meyer, *Creating GI Jane: Sexuality and Power in the Women's Army Corps During World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Julia A. Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Populist Protest, Colonial Encounters (Algeria and Tunisia, 1800-1904)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Clare Midgley, "Gender and

of analysis, working outward towards traditional centers of power.<sup>101</sup> Employing this perspective reveals critical elements of female participation in urban struggle. For example, examining police records (a traditional center of power) exposes police interest in women, but working from the margins towards that center reveals that women were acutely aware of the fact they were under police surveillance. Margins-to-center analysis also allows the reader to see moments when women's actions resisted elected political authority, sometimes altering the trajectory of a revolution's events.

Secondly, scholarship on women as members of urban working classes has provided a clearer understanding of class formation, and the particular ways poverty and illiteracy affect women and their forms of participation – all relevant to communardes during 1870-71 events.<sup>102</sup> Most who research women of the working classes have generally applied a feminist approach of some kind, demonstrating how the interpretation changes when women's lives are integrated into definitions of poverty, labor and class,

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Imperialism: Mapping the Connections,” *Gender and Imperialism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998); Cheryl Johnson-Odim, “Actions Louder than Words: The Historical Task of Defining Feminist Consciousness in Colonial West Africa,” in *Nation, Empire, Colony: Historicizing Gender and Race*, eds., Ruth Roach Pierson and Nupur Chaudhuri (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); and Françoise Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries: Colonial Family Romance and Métissage* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

<sup>101</sup> Cynthia Enloe's, *The Curious Feminist*, focuses on the significance of positioning analytical questions from the margins, silences, and lower rungs of society, particularly in making women's lives visible. Also see, bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2000).

<sup>102</sup> These include Rachel R. Fuchs, *Poor and Pregnant in Paris* and *Gender and Poverty in Nineteenth-Century Europe*; Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class*; Sonya O. Rose, *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England*; Elinor Accampo, Rachel G. Fuchs, and Mary Lynn Stewart, *Gender and the Politics of Social Reform in France, 1870-1914* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1995); Laura Levine Frader and Sonya O. Rose in *Gender and Class in Modern Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1996); and Jacques Donzelot in *The Policing of Families* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1997 [1977]).

urban life, and the development of welfare states.<sup>103</sup> This body of work helps clarify women's repeated demands for immediate equal pay and education in order to effect revolutionary change and be equal citizens in the Commune's new order.

Finally, materialist feminist theory reveals how sexism connects with other forms of oppression, but is not merely a subcomponent of class, race, and other oppressions.<sup>104</sup> The particular significance of this approach within Commune historiography presented itself in that early and virtually unnoticed conclusion by Schulkind. He noted that women's organized participation in the Union of Women during the Paris Commune "is the first occasion on which a large organization of French women explains the inferior status of women in terms of class."<sup>105</sup> As another historian briefly acknowledged, "women workers constituted a *sous-prolétariat*."<sup>106</sup> According to Schulkind, sex discrimination is then the "means of maintaining the privileges of the ruling classes," in which therefore, men of all classes participate.<sup>107</sup>

Materialist feminist methodology reveals moments when women specifically articulated sex-based, not only socio-economic, oppression. Women, often collectively,

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<sup>103</sup> I am using the term feminist here to indicate a primary focus on women's experience, with a corroborating analysis revealing the specificity of women's oppression within the historical context analyzed. This analytical lens does not preclude, and often requires, the overlapping analysis of race, gender, and socio-economic class categories, to name three.

<sup>104</sup> Christine Delphy, *The Main Enemy: A Materialist Analysis of Women's Oppression* (London: Women's Research and Resources Centre Publications, 1977), i. Additionally, the work of Monique Wittig and other French materialist feminists introduced to English readers in Diana Leonard and Lisa Adkins, eds., *Sex in Question: French Materialist Feminism* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1996) consistently influences the questions asked in this dissertation. One aspect of Wittig's life-long work serves as a continuing theoretical thread of inquiry, that being a "discussion on the debates about the relation of women to violence, both as subjects of the enactment of violence and as its victims." For this quote, see Frances Bartkowski's *Feminist Utopias* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 16.

<sup>105</sup> Schulkind, *The Paris Commune: The View From the Left*, 171.

<sup>106</sup> Marie-Thérèse Eyquem, "Les femmes au service de la Commune," 326. Significantly, but often overlooked, is the fact that French feminist-socialist Flora Tristan first argued this point, prior to Marx's 1848 oft-cited comment that women were the proletariat of men.

<sup>107</sup> Schulkind, *The Paris Commune: The View From the Left*, 171.

creatively and directly forced men to hear, acknowledge, and, at times, accommodate their demands – and their presence - as they carried out the political and military goals of the Commune. Men of all ranks often saw women as a formidable social group that must be taken seriously so that the Commune could continue.<sup>108</sup> Some communards saw communardes as threatening enough that they demanded women's absence from all things political or military, something that did not occur in what was essentially a total war.<sup>109</sup> This method allows an assessment of sex category as a class category, analyzing women's individual and collective disagreements with the revolutionary goals of another "class." Its implementation here supports a materialist feminist approach in the study of history.

This study argues that "women made the revolution" in ways that subsequently disappeared from historical treatments until recently, but were clearly visible to, and scrutinized by, other women, as well as male authorities during events, leaving archival and published records of this visibility.<sup>110</sup> In other moments of revolutionary upheaval, unless some women officially attain – and maintain - the status of warrior, guerrilla, or

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<sup>108</sup> In another context, Christine Adams's, "Maternal Societies in France: Private Charity Before the Welfare State," *Journal of Women's History* 17, No. 1 (Spring 2005) notes the strength with which women of the *Société de charité maternelle* and similar charities of the nineteenth century, offered strong resistance to government challenges to the autonomy of their organizations and their female leadership. In Adams' article, however, the *Sociétés* provided a "unique and empowering opportunity for elite women" only.

<sup>109</sup> Although most profoundly associated with World War I, the term total war is now allied with the American Civil War. The associations between that Civil War and the one that occurred in France in 1871 are especially clear in Philip M. Katz, *From Appomattox to Montmartre: Americans and the Paris Commune* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998). The necessity of using all parts of the Parisian population to engage in war against the government of the Republic (and in the preceding siege against the Prussians), the use of "improved" industrialized technology, which increased communarde death tolls substantially, and true invisibility of a demarcation between battlefronts and homefronts situates the Commune within a context of total war.

<sup>110</sup> Quote is from article by André Léo (pseudonym for Léodile Champsieux) in the communarde newspaper, *La Sociale*, 8 Mai 1871.

political leader, their presence recedes in the history. Even in cases where women have achieved this prominence, as with Vietnam's "long-haired [women] warriors," who have recently become the subject of western research, they did not achieve political power and their place in the family remained virtually the same as before, relegating them to on-going invisibility if one only analyzes "permanent" results of revolution.<sup>111</sup> Seemingly across time and space, the political results of "successful" revolutions, as well as the repression of unsuccessful ones have generally left women on the margins of power, and therefore most often on the margins of the corresponding historiography.<sup>112</sup> This recuperation resists that tradition.

Chapter I, "A New Republic for *Tous*, September 1870," includes three parts. Addressed first is the background for French women's republican and revolutionary participation, as well as the context of the republic's declaration on 4 September. The next part introduces some of the women whose writings provide evidence for my arguments. Finally, the women's early-September words, political presence, and military associations, ultimately significant during the Commune, reveal women's views during the early weeks of the republic; autobiographical and government-generated sources highlight the role gender played in women's activities and the discourse calling them to citizen service. This chapter makes a case that in the early days of the new Republic,

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<sup>111</sup> Sandra C. Taylor, *Vietnamese Women at War: Fighting for Ho Chi Minh and the Revolution* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1999), 2, 6.

<sup>112</sup> In addition to Taylor's book on Vietnamese women, a few examples are indicative of women's revolutionary participation not resulting in permanent change in their status, no matter their work in the name of the revolutions. Siân Reynolds, ed., *Women, State and Revolution: Essays on Power and Gender in Europe since 1789* (Sussex: Wheatsheaf Books, 1986); Irene Staunton, ed., *Mothers of the Revolution: The War Experiences of Thirty Zimbabwean Women* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Mary Nash, *Defying Male Civilization: Women in the Spanish Civil War* (Denver: Arden Press, 1995); and Alison Plowden, *Women All on Fire: The Women of the English Civil War* (Gloucestershire: Sutton, 1998).



national and municipal government officials saw women as crucial players in events, as did women themselves. Therefore, when the gates of Paris closed to Prussian siege during that month, women's work became especially important to the survival and defense of those in the city, merging formerly public and private spheres into an array of "publics" in a distinctly gendered fashion.

Chapter II, "'Women Busy from Morning to Night': The Siege Era," follows the escalation of women's participation in events through the fallout from the siege, which ended on 28 January 1871. It argues that the severe circumstances and volatile emergencies of the siege heightened women's realization of their gendered social and political positions. The boundaries between appropriate and inappropriate female behavior became increasingly blurred, allowing a greater range of acceptable activities for women of any class. The siege brought virtually all women who remained in Paris – not just those in the working classes - in direct, continuous contact with public political events. The National Government blatantly called on *citoyennes* for support; at other times, its implicit calls for women's particular skills or knowledge highlight its reliance on them. Given those calls, the nature of women's responses reveals points of contention and conflict with authorities. The siege drastically transformed class, gender, and sex hierarchies and relationships, also bringing women's actions under the further scrutiny of authorities.

The final three chapters analyze events between 18 March and 28 May 1871, the markers of the seventy-two days of the Paris Commune, employing mapping components and evidence from a developing database. Chapter III, "'Vive la Commune!': Women's

Verbal Occupation of Commune Space,” argues that women’s speech and rhetoric during the Commune expressed their logic for participation in events, with many women of the popular classes employing a gendered analysis of their oppression. Women of a range of classes interpreted the revolution of the Commune, including its promise of a new social order, through their experiences. Their use of discussion and debate in sex-exclusive and mixed settings reveals an integration of private and public arenas, redefining those terms in practice. Street corners and public demonstrations saw women speaking out. The chapter illuminates that women’s viewpoints were heard in every arrondissement, with central and southern arrondissements, not only Montmartre, hearing what they had to say. This point also reveals that the male leadership elected in the wake of women’s and men’s 18 March verbal declaration underscored women’s participation as crucial to the Commune’s success. Secret police still in Paris closely surveyed women at this juncture, contributing to their later arrests. What women said mattered to those aiming to control them.

The fourth chapter, “‘Taking One’s Part in the Revolution’: Women’s Political Pressure Tactics,” argues that women exerted sustained, if at times, haphazard, pressure on male political leadership, attempting to effect change and exposing a universalization of political tools. Their political pressure actively integrated women’s demands into Commune military, political, and social goals. Some of their tactics were earlier put to use during the siege, including writing letters to newspapers, signing petitions addressed to leadership, and organizing women’s employment and general food distribution, paid for by the government. Commune government leaders recognized women’s significance

both in aiding their cause, and in opposing leadership's attempts to marginalize their equal value. This chapter also posits that police and other observers often characterized most, if not all, women and women's groups as worthy of suspicion.

The final chapter, "In Defense of a 'New Life': Women's Military Participation," argues that women's militant participation altered the path of the revolution as they asserted their equality in its ranks. While women had occupied National Guard and other military units during the siege, women's armed presence during the Commune shocked contemporaries and subsequently led to severe punishment in its aftermath. Communardes occupied military posts wearing military attire, indicating their allegiance to the Commune as well as opposition to the limits placed on them by its leadership. This chapter concludes by analyzing the violence during 21-28 May 1871. Women sometimes integrated themselves into the fighting in ways that did not initially indicate their sex. However, the frequency with which police and military officials targeted specifically female bodies for execution or arrest demonstrates that women were not only a subset of "the rabble" of the working classes. Their speech, political claims to the public sphere, and occupation of military roles brought them particular attention, having indicated their willingness to fight in a revolution for their new social order.

Combined, the five chapters argue for the significance of women's actions as part of a revolution of *le peuple* in Paris during the months between 4 September 1870 and 28 May 1871 as they placed the gendered organization of both public and private space at center stage. Women were heard and seen everywhere across Paris, making not only gendered components of this workers' revolution audible and visible, but the viewpoints

of the working classes more generally. The months of the siege served as a training ground for women's integration of private and public as they exercised agency, simultaneously exercising an awareness of public discourse. The unique historical characteristics of the Commune offered women a public language and forum for their longer-term grievances against their gendered oppression. In this instance, speech, political influence, and military experience provided the means for women initially to transcend the paradox of their citizenship.

## I. A NEW REPUBLIC FOR *TOUS*, SEPTEMBER 1870

In the immediate aftermath of the Commune, Alexandre Dumas, *fil*s, surveying the follies of various French Republics wrote, “The Republic of ‘93 killed its sons; in ‘48, it killed its brothers; in ‘71, it killed its mother.”<sup>1</sup> The overlap between the gendered words and symbols of republic, sons, brothers, and mothers and the actual killing of sons, brothers, and mothers that took place at the founding of three French Republics reveals the complexity and significance of gender and women in those events. In the case of Dumas *fil*s, his use of The Republic of ’71, and not ’70, tellingly reveals his association of the 1871 Paris Commune and its violent repression with the establishment of the Third Republic, although a Republic was formally declared in September 1870, lasting, in various forms, until the Vichy regime of 1940.<sup>2</sup> Dumas concluded that the events of 1871 were the most dangerous of all, resulting, as he puts it, in a matricide. In this case, the lives and deaths of real mothers and other women were not mere rhetorical devices.

The early weeks of September 1870 provide important information for understanding women’s later Commune involvement. Initially, Chapter I includes an assessment of Parisian women’s participation in revolutions and republics prior to 1870

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<sup>1</sup>Dumas, *Une Lettre sur les choses du jour*, 15. The fact that *elle* can reflect the feminine pronoun, she, or the ungendered, it, increases its gendered significance when referring to a feminized personification of a republic. For the era under discussion, it is clear that although *citoyens* and *tous* could, at times, indicate men only, they were also the appropriate, although universally-gendered terms to imply men and women. These terms, although seemingly limiting in some ways, also therefore, opened doors for inclusion – doors that remained open during the siege. Consequently, where necessary for clarity, I will use the French words that indicate a universal application of a term (such as *lui*), indicating women’s inclusion in the words, when translation into English either becomes awkward or must – ironically – be translated into a gendered term (*him*, in this example).

<sup>2</sup> The Third Republic is variously dated from 1870, 1871, 1873, or 1875, depending on whether a particular election or the acceptance of the Third Republic’s 1875 constitution is used as the basis for the dating. However, only in 1879 was the constitution amended to reflect a more republican direction, with the Chambers finally returning from Versailles, where they had fled when the Commune arose.

and the effects of the reduction of Imperial restraints during the last years of Louis-Napoleon's reign. Next, it introduces women's autobiographical accounts. Finally, it makes a case that the initial weeks following the declaration of a republic in Paris on 4 September 1870 suggest reasons for Parisian women's sustained wartime participation, culminating in the final, Bloody Week of the Commune. Lacking suffrage, women nonetheless positioned themselves and their labor as crucial to these political events; in like manner, municipal and national officials discursively included them in calls for citizen unity and labor. Early on, working women's visibility could displease male officials and their reasons for participating did not always reflect men's priorities. This chapter reviews women's actions in the days leading to the closure of the gates of Paris against Prussian siege, arguing that women's dichotomized public and private works all became essential to the survival and defense of Parisians. As such, those spheres began to merge into an array of "publics" suggesting, even validating, broader forms of participation available to women. This participation also discloses the central role gender played in both public and private arenas, increasing its significance as they merged. This chapter signifies the early weeks of September 1870 as the beginning of a marked trajectory of experiences and discourse that led to women, as well as thousands of men, becoming targets of *mitrailleuses*, revolvers, and arrest at the end of May 1871.

### **Background**

Laws, especially the Napoleonic Code, had ossified sex category distinctions since the early nineteenth century, although harsh suppression of women and their influence on revolution had begun early in the First Republic and its Revolution.

Suppression generally proceeded from agitation, with counter-resistance often following. Women of the urban popular classes never aligned their lives with Rousseau's ideas of separate spheres, nor could they afford to. Parisian market women heightened Napoleon's abhorrence for popular agitation in 1789, 1793, and 1795, resulting in the Republic's construction "as much against women as without them."<sup>3</sup> However, during the First, Second, and early in what was to become the Third, Republics, women altered political events and the revolutions that accompanied the births of those republics. Their collective voices appear to have grown louder with each event, although each time, violent suppression followed.<sup>4</sup> By the time of the Commune, the themes of equal pay with men, secular education for girls as well as boys, and social equality for women had been repeated – and repeatedly silenced – every time a Republic took hold. However, women's analysis of their gendered positions also grew with collective experience and memory.

The year 1848 ushered in universal male suffrage and ended French-sponsored slavery. Women held meetings, edited newspapers, and publicly demonstrated for their place in a new Republic, using wide-ranging rhetoric and public expressions.<sup>5</sup> As Joan

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<sup>3</sup> Quote from Joan Landes' *Women and the Public Sphere* in *Women, State, and Revolution: Essays on Power and Gender in Europe Since 1789*, ed., Siân Reynolds (Sussex: Wheatsheaf, 1986), 113.

<sup>4</sup> Joan Landes argues that the exclusion of women from the bourgeois public sphere was central to the First Republic, though the Commune's repression shows that this exclusion continued well into the Third Republic. See, Joan Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988). The cycle of women's assertions of equality, followed by repressive violence is the core of Claire Moses' argument in *French Feminism in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* (Albany: SUNY, 1984).

<sup>5</sup> Universal male suffrage in France meant that the electorate suddenly increased from approximately 240,000 to 9,000,000 males, heightening, for many, the fears about the role of (male) workers in politics. For women's public roles in 1848-1851 see, Judith A. DeGroat, "The Public Nature of Women's Work: Definitions and Debates During the Revolution of 1848," *French Historical Studies* 20, No. 1 (Winter

Scott writes, “During the Revolution of 1848, feminists dramatized their conviction that their place was in the public sphere by entering it.”<sup>6</sup> Yet again the demands for equal pay, education, and social equivalence rang out. During June Days, women fought, died, and were arrested. Charlotte Corday, who had assassinated Marat in 1793, had become a symbol of martyrdom for liberty by 1851. In that year, an inn-keeper’s daughter paraded with a red flag shouting, “I want to be a Charlotte Republican!”<sup>7</sup> Corday was not a caricature or feminine representation of republicanism or liberty; she had been a real person. Haussmanization, altering the class map of Paris in the 1860s and since, attempted to inhibit the revolutionary impulses of those who might identify as “Charlotte Republicans.” In the case of the Commune, however, Haussman’s efforts aided revolutionary efforts on many fronts, but especially in the early hours of 18 March 1871, when women gathered to harass soldiers in a working-class district created by the redesign of Paris.

By the late 1860s, when Louis-Napoleon had relaxed restrictions on the press, public meetings, and labor organizing, Parisian women took advantage of the openness to renew their calls for equal pay, education, and social equality after almost twenty years of suppression.<sup>8</sup> France, and especially Paris, likely had the most diverse women’s

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1997): 31-47; Claire G. Moses, “Feminist Activism During the Revolutionary Upheavals of 1848-1851,” in *French Feminism in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*.

<sup>6</sup> Joan W. Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1996), 81.

<sup>7</sup> Cited in David Barry, “Community, Tradition, and Memory Among Rebel Working-Class Women of Paris, 1830, 1848, 1871,” *European Review of History* 7 No. 2 (Autumn 2000): 272.

<sup>8</sup> Moses argues that alliances of feminists with Left groups throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century connected the fate of feminists to the fate of the Left, which appears true. However, as Alice Bullard demonstrates, the Left of (male) workers recovered faster and more completely following repression – including that of the Commune – than did feminists representing working women’s interests. Alice Bullard, *Exile to Paradise*:



movements in the world just prior to the Franco-Prussian War and a declaration of a Republic encouraged optimism on feminist and worker fronts. A strong and diverse collection of advocates for women saw a new Republic as an opportunity to argue for the end of class *and* gender inequalities. Just as Charlotte Corday's murder of Marat had demonstrated, women could and did act against men, affect the outcome of revolution, and saw themselves as necessary political actors.

In the new Republic declared in Paris on 4 September 1870, non-republican conservatives hoping the declaration to be provisory still held considerable political and social sway and situated themselves to maintain as much power as possible. The central feature of this republic remained universal adult male suffrage, in which citizens equaled voters and both would be adult males.<sup>9</sup> This "universal" suffrage also meant that women, boys, and, often, elderly males, making up about two-thirds of the overall population, held no direct access to citizenship, let alone suffrage.<sup>10</sup> Although universal manhood suffrage had been contested since 1789, and especially in the wake of 1848, the renewal

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*Savagery and Civilization in Paris and the South Pacific, 1790-1900* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> James R. Lehning, *To Be a Citizen: The Political Culture of the Early French Third Republic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); 2. Lehning offers no adequate discussion of the effects of the Commune or its repression and ignores women's positions in discussions of citizenship, although he acknowledges them as a group who resisted particular components of Third Republic citizenship.

<sup>10</sup> Barry, "Community, Tradition, and Memory," 123. Barry follows this point with his view that 20<sup>th</sup> century feminists "were able to reclaim these voices from the past and obtain some of the rights they called for. Arguably, children and aged citizens are waiting for them still." However, I have no evidence suggesting that reclamation of communardes advanced women's access to political rights (whether or not it could have), which his statement and its context implies; later feminism in France took a decidedly conservative turn and disassociated from communarde actions. For this point see Moses, *French Feminism*; Eichner, *Surmounting the Barricades*; and Patrick Kay Bidelman, *Pariahs Stand Up!: The Founding of the Liberal Feminist Movement in France, 1858-1889* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1982). James E. McMillan's, *Housewife or Harlot: The Place of Women in French Society, 1870-1940* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981) has no discussion of communardes relevant to this issue. All note the fact that "respectability was the key for republicans and feminists," as McMillan describes.

of parliamentary institutions in 1870 threatened conservatives and many republicans alike, with a French government under direct control of the electorate through the ballot.<sup>11</sup> This electorate would not represent only the property-holding classes and their interests.

As James R. Lehning has indicated, founding a republic meant finding answers to difficult questions, among them, what should republican politics be and what distinguishes a republican system from a monarchist or imperial system. Therefore, “consolidating that republic meant convincing French men and women to accept [the] answers.”<sup>12</sup> The convincing implies that republican versions of citizenship began, even remained, contested and that even non-citizens - in this case women - needed to accept the resultant version of citizenship for this republican endeavor to work.<sup>13</sup> As Elinor Accampo specifies, “historians have long ignored or dismissed the centrality gender had for the conceptualization and practice of republicanism,” arguing further that failure to analyze women and gender within the development of republicanism in the Third Republic, “leaves unresolved many of the paradoxes so often associated with [it].”<sup>14</sup> Assessing the role of women as legitimate *citoyennes* during the upheaval of the early days and months of that Republic contributes to a better understanding of the paradoxes to which Accampo alludes, as well as a clearer understanding of the role of the Commune in those paradoxes and the Third Republic.

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<sup>11</sup>Lehning, *To Be a Citizen*, 183.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 5.

<sup>14</sup>Elinor A. Accampo, “Gender, Social Policy, and the Formation of the Third Republic, An Introduction,” in *Gender and the Politics of Social Reform in France, 1870-1914*, 1.

Although male republicans, and certainly male conservatives, did not see the need for the active *citoyenne*, individuals of both sexes nonetheless used the term and often tried to create meaning in or apply meaning to it. Though uncomfortable for many, the unity implied by the rubric, “citizen,” was paramount under the circumstances facing the new government. War with Prussia, a changing seat of government – from Paris to Bordeaux, and eventually to Versailles - unstable colonial relations in Algeria, in particular, and the threat of Parisian unrest contributed to an impression that the new Republic required “order” from and for its citizens above all, yet seemed unable to accomplish it.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps the quick consolidation, so desperately needed, could not occur, leaving France even more vulnerable. Women’s active support as *citoyennes* representing all levels of society became even more important, although not articulated as such.<sup>16</sup>

War time accommodated, often demanded, incursions by women into men’s

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<sup>15</sup> Related to this, the defeat of France and the rise of the Commune led *indigènes* to say, “The French are defeated, they are fighting among themselves, Paris is burning. The French troops have left [Algeria for Paris]. The moment is right: let’s take back our independence.” Charles-Robert Ageron’s, *Les Algériens Musulmans et la France (1871-1919)* Vol. I (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968), citing Villot’s testimony to La Commission d’enquête as to the cause of the Algerian uprisings. A mere five days after women confronted troops attempting to seize Parisian cannon on 18 March, Letourneux wrote from Algiers, “Generals Lecomte and Thomas have been shot. Civil war has come...what effect will this produce among the *indigènes*? It’s surely the case that they are going to repeat that the Republic is in a state of disorder and anarchy.” Ageron, *Les Algériens Musulmans*, 12, fn 1. French troops were booed in the streets and most had been sent to France (in preparation for the assault on the Commune) by March and many took events as a “sign from god” that the time was right for insurrection.

<sup>16</sup> In, *Women and the Limits of Citizenship in the French Revolution* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), Olwen H. Hufton sets up her “engendered crowd” of 1789, noting that the Constituent Assembly excluded from suffrage the people within the categories of poor, servants, and women. However, Hufton does not mention and misses the significance of the fact that most of those in the categories of poor and servants were also women.

gendered terrain against a common enemy.<sup>17</sup> In addition to increased use of the term, *citoyenne*, and its various forms in the months following the declaration of the Republic, many publicly-posted *affiches* reveal that local and national governments demanded women's direct participation in this war effort.<sup>18</sup> As this chapter will show, the increase in appropriate public spaces for women, as well as the public necessity of women's private endeavors, allowed middle-class women to occupy new publics; working women – long visible in these arenas – now found discursive and material justification for their presence. Women saw universal calls including them in, *Au Peuple*, *Aux Habitants*, *Aux Familles*, *Parisiens*, *Concitoyens*, and *Aux Commerçants*. However, since women still faced limits to their equality, even while functioning as *citoyennes* in masculine roles, clearly maleness, not masculinity, defined formal citizenship.<sup>19</sup> Still, women's exposure to these publics allowed them to analyze their experiences there. Some of their experiences offered precedence for learning how to better use rhetoric, political pressure tactics, and military roles to get what they wanted, but also provided more evidence that their lives, as women, were oppressively gendered in public *and* private. A brief history of French women's association with republican citizenship exposes why events following 4 September could alienate female republicans from their male counterparts, forming a

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<sup>17</sup> One of the best descriptions of this repeated, if temporary, suspension of behavior and gender norms in times of political and military turmoil is Julie Peteet's, *Gender in Crisis: Women and the Palestinian Resistance Movement* (New York: Columbia, 1991).

<sup>18</sup> Public announcements used in this dissertation are culled from the *Murailles* (1874) and from the Siege and Commune Collection of the Charles Deering McCormick Special Collections Library at Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, hereafter, NWU/Siege Collection.

<sup>19</sup> Maleness and masculinity, while related, are significantly different, although Joan Scott contended in, *Only Paradoxes to Offer*, that masculinity was the "common ground of citizenship until 1944." See, Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer*, 10. "Masculine" women, however, could not access that "common ground."

basis of some perpetual differences through the era under study.

Significantly, the body politic, or *corps politique*, according to Rousseau and others since, was male. In 1793, Lanjuinais said that the word, citizen, meant a member of civil society, of the nation, and “therefore children, the insane, minors, women, and condemned criminals . . . would not be citizens.”<sup>20</sup> The centrality of the term, *citoyen* during the French Revolution is from this core, male, Rousseauian meaning, necessitating the transformation of some *sujets* into *citoyens*, but transferring the “responsibility” for children, the insane, condemned criminals, and females from the body of the monarch – and via him down through male family members - to the body of citizens, in which fathers represented the ideal.<sup>21</sup> Specifically, select males and all females became or remained the feudal subjects of individual men, or in some cases, men collectively, who were also citizens.<sup>22</sup>

The reality of most women’s urban lives – whether in 1789 or in 1870-71 – did not reflect this passive *sujet* position, and perhaps more to the point, not reflecting it helped eventually to remove them from the history of the Commune. No female active subjects existed within Rousseau’s liberal republicanism; therefore, these active subjects – some eventually known as communardes – could not exist in the record of the development of this Republic, nor could their articulation of republicanism, which

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<sup>20</sup> Sewell, “Le citoyen/la citoyenne,” 105.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>22</sup> The materialist feminist work of Colette Capitan influences my interpretation of the lingering feudal state of women after the French Revolution. Colette Capitan Peter, “A Historical Precedent for Patriarchal Oppression: The Old Regime and the French Revolution,” *Feminist Issues* 4, No. 1 (Spring 1984) and Colette Capitan, *La Nature à l’ordre du jour 1789-1793*. (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 1993).

included themselves, be in any discussion of republican ideals. Since female active subjects abounded in Paris as early as 4 September, it is little wonder why a woman calling herself “republican,” would inherently mean something different than her male counterpart. Although imaginary female figures represented the Republic (and eventually, the Commune), active female bodies could not find direct access to republican politics or representation of the self, as perhaps Charlotte Corday had discovered much earlier. However, women’s understandings of *citoyen* or *citoyenne*, whether acceptable in Rousseauian republicanism or not, could not be ignored at the time, even though they would be all but erased from the history.

Parisians of both sexes had a revolutionary republican tradition, and non-aristocratic, non-bourgeois women in pre-Haussmann Paris lived much of their lives in the streets of Paris. In revolutionary times such as 1789-94, they heard public political debate as they shopped, walked to jobs, talked to neighbors, or drummed up business. Working women’s lives were public in many ways that other women’s lives were not. Small apartments or smaller garrets for too-many people meant much of life took place outside. For women of the non-propertied classes in particular, private life was often, therefore, public life – all gendered in particular ways.<sup>23</sup> Non-elite women participated in the body politic, whether or not Rousseau - or the 1870 Republic - had granted them permission.

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<sup>23</sup> Ellen Ross, “‘Fierce Questions and Taunts’: Married Life in Working Class London, 1870-1914,” *Feminist Studies* 8 (Fall 1982); Sonya O. Rose, *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1992). Anna Clark, *The Struggle for the Breeches: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class: Gender and the Making of the British Working Class* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

Working-class people existed on the margins of political and social power in many ways, but since 1789 they had lived geographically at the center of major political upheavals in France, contributing to the most consistent threats to political, social, and economic stability: “bread” riots and barricades.<sup>24</sup> Women’s central position in this threat, especially as represented in bread crises, required significant attention from government at all levels. Thermidorians of July 1794 had dismantled or changed many political institutions of the Revolution, with some efforts aimed at negating the role of the urban crowd; however, women had previously benefited from these institutions and did not collectively forget them, although with rare exception, women effectively ceased organized political activity when outlawed.<sup>25</sup> Democratized institutions gave way to oligarchic ones and formerly “popular” clubs evolved into venues only for “men of property”; segueing into the Napoleonic years, a gathering of more than five women could bring arrest. While these changes perhaps still granted increased access to a select group of men, women’s access to any political status – republican or otherwise – again disappeared. Additionally, and at least since Napoleon, the fear of armed Parisian insurrection outweighed the risks of not arming the urban residents – often including the National Guard – against foreign invasion. So, while armed military participation vitally contributed to a republican definition of an active *citoyen*, many Parisian *citoyens* obliged only in ways that identified them as *potentially* ready to defend their nation with arms. During the Franco-Prussian War and later, boys, if they served in the National Guard,

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<sup>24</sup> Levy, Applewhite, and Johnson, *Women in Revolutionary Paris 1789-1795*, 9-10.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

automatically gained citizens' rights to bear arms and vote.<sup>26</sup> Even by those slippery categorizations of the time, females – urban or otherwise – could not, should not, enjoy access to citizenship through military activity.

Women could not gain full use of the term, citizen, but they needed titles in a nation that would no longer accommodate class-based references; in 1792, *citoyenne* took on a form, if not a clear meaning, as a universal term of address. Earlier, Abbé Sieyès had created the terms, “active and passive rights,” to be reflected in active and passive citizens and barred some, including women, from citizenship of any kind.<sup>27</sup> The 1791 Constitution reproduced Sieyès' ideas.<sup>28</sup> When Robespierre argued that these categories of citizenship robbed poorer (male) inhabitants of France of their citizenship rights, he unwittingly opened the door for women to argue similarly.<sup>29</sup> Ultimately, 1789 and even 1848 did not formally leave this door open, but at least since Olympe de Gouge penned, *The Rights of Woman and Female Citizen* in 1791, some women had followed that argument.<sup>30</sup>

Robespierre's acute structural analysis revealed to him and others, the material reality of the Assembly's words, meant to hide the lie of “universal suffrage.” He therefore intimated that the majority of the Assembly “was quite aware of what it was

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<sup>26</sup> Taithe, *Citizenship and Wars: France in Turmoil 1870-1871* (London: Routledge, 2001), 118.

<sup>27</sup> Abbé Sieyès, *What is the Third Estate*; also, Sewell, *Le citoyen/la citoyenne*, 106-7.

<sup>28</sup> Sewell, “Le citoyen/la citoyenne,” 111.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 112-113.

<sup>30</sup> 1789 and 1848 had ultimately gained women nothing of the magnitude some women thought possible, Edith Thomas links that point to women's participation in the Commune. Edith Thomas, ‘*Les Pétroleuses*’ (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), 8.



doing, but covered its designs with a subtle misuse of language.”<sup>31</sup> He lost the Constituent Assembly argument, but 1792 brought about the change anyway, as the 1791 Constitution was overturned. Although the members of the Assembly never allowed female participation - although they debated it - the discursive use of *citoyenne* provided a sphere of recognition and participation in practice, if not in law. For women, then, “the danger of the locution *citoyenne* was . . . that day after day, in all the routines of social life, it unintentionally interpolated women as active members of the sovereign, as rightful coparticipants in the political life of the nation. It is therefore hardly surprising that some women answered the call.”<sup>32</sup> At times, that call seems to extend more from women’s actions, rather than the other way around.

Whether demanding bread and lower prices for it in 1789, parading in the streets in support of male troops as members of the crowd at the birth of a third republic in 1870, or accompanying cannon in military attire at the declaration of the Commune in March 1871, some women participated as political players under the rubric, *citoyenne*. During the Revolution, the *Citoyennes Républicaines Révolutionnaires* had organized as a women’s club that specifically discussed and acted on the political issues that men’s political clubs did; in 1848, the *Société de la Voix des femmes*, named after a newspaper, acted similarly.<sup>33</sup> In the early months of a new, Third, Republic, women followed suit. Since 1789, succeeding generations of revolutionary women retained revolutionary

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<sup>31</sup> Sewell, “Le citoyen/la citoyenne,” 113.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 114-115.

<sup>33</sup> Indicating a government-imposed structural shift in its title, the universalist name of another newspaper, *Politique des femmes*, was replaced by the particularist, *Opinion des femmes*, immediately following the 1848 June Days.

traditions, but when the opportunity arose, women also simply took advantage – as did republican men – of newly-granted freedoms of press and assembly. Ungendered opportunity, as much as gendered revolutionary tradition, guided their actions.

The last years of the Second Empire had seen Parisian women renew their calls for change, but September 1870 offered the possibility for change, virtually overnight. In 1870-1871 and beyond, the contested arena of French republicanism and citizenship had as its context, national military defeat, siege, economic hardship, and a government, self-exiled from Paris. These events had substantially disrupted *l'ordre général de la société*, particularly in Paris, whether or not women evinced their active *citoyenne* roles. As in the 1789 Revolution, male citizens in 1870-1871 often preferred – even demanded – that women's roles as *citoyennes* be supportive and complementary to them and not take on the “heartless and virilized caricatures” of *citoyens*.<sup>34</sup> Women did not always agree, nor was that ideal even possible. The declaration of the Republic in 1870 elevated women's awareness of, and importance in, political events, as they again positioned themselves as key figures in the new Republic – a status on which local and national officials depended, as this chapter will show. Although representative of different sections of the population of Paris, the writings of Victorine Malenfant Rouchy, Geneviève Bréton, Eliska Vincent, and other women, all demonstrate their concerns with citizen service in defense of their city and nation.

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<sup>34</sup> Sewell, “Le citoyen/la citoyenne,” 119.

## Memoir and Letter Writers

Memoirs by women specifically detailing 1870-71 events in Paris remain few in comparison with the thousands of women whose names became part of the archival record. However, these testimonies prove invaluable for unearthing the motivations and practices of their authors, which can then be evaluated in relationship to other discourse. In memoirs, as well as police records, newspaper articles, and observers' notes, women of various classes assert themselves as central actors in, and critical observers of, the development of a new republic. They often harked back to 1848-1851 events, either as child observers, participants, or rhetorically, with the 1789 era providing an occasional revolutionary backdrop. Some made their resistance to male bias, even misogyny, explicit. Not previously the subject of consistent or rigorous analysis, the life of Victorine Malenfant Rouchy (1838-1921) indicates that even early in September 1870, some women's goals often centered the gendered organization of both public and private space.

Victorine Malenfant Rouchy, later Brocher, was born into a family with a revolutionary and republican-socialist tradition, which clearly affected her Commune participation and later writings.<sup>35</sup> Parisian by birth, she finished her life in Switzerland and England. Published in 1909, her memoir, *Souvenirs d'une morte vivante*, narrates

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<sup>35</sup> I refer to her throughout this dissertation as Victorine Malenfant Rouchy, but years after the Commune and death of her first husband, Jean Rouchy, she married Gustave Brocher, using his last name when she wrote her memoir. Therefore, Brocher will appear footnoted as the author's name.

her life through her post-Commune escape from Paris in 1872.<sup>36</sup> She wrote specifically to refute reactionary “histories” such as those of Maxime du Camp, Edouard Goncourt, and Alexandre Dumas, *fils*. Her writing also demonstrates observational and analytical skills that render it more generally valuable as a primary source for this period.

Ultimately aligned with anarchists, Malenfant Rouchy’s life and narrative is rooted in her childhood experiences as the daughter of little-known, but active, republican-socialists. Her father, a bourgeois-turned-*cordonnier*, originally destined for the priesthood, was a *franc-maçon* with ideas of “republican Christianity.” His daughter also learned his trade, something that kept her employed while hiding from police in post-Commune Paris, but also demonstrating the centrality of economic independence in working women’s revolution agendas. According to her account, 1848 and the declaration of the Second Republic saw the diminutive Victorine on her father’s shoulders among the celebratory Paris crowd. With the coup d’état of December 1851, her father went into hiding and his wife and thirteen-year-old daughter became the subject of police observation and harassment. This era honed her early analysis of power, as well as her observation of police tactics and priorities, all of which she would employ in September 1870.

Malenfant Rouchy’s memoir was published almost forty years after the Commune, though, according to her, she kept a diary during events. She produced handwritten episodes of her life long before she produced her published volume. At the encouragement of former communards and Commune aficionados such as Lucien

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<sup>36</sup> Although she intended to complete her memoir with another volume, it was never published and research has not uncovered it in archival fonds.

Decaves – whose archive in the International Institute of Social History contains the Brocher files – she produced her narrative specifically to counter misogynist attitudes of other authors, still turning out vitriolic accounts decades after the Commune.<sup>37</sup> Although her presentation can therefore be seen as substantially biased, she clearly states her point of view up front and offers substantive evidence for her observations. Corroborating archival documentation supports much of Malenfant Rouchy’s memoir, including letters sent from her husband during his imprisonment after the Commune, letters between her mother and herself, her husband’s prison records, newspapers, and other memoirs and post-Commune letters mentioning or addressing her. She asserts her agency – and that of other participants – while also acknowledging her awareness of other discursive elements that are part of her environment during and after events. Although gendered in the sense that her perspectives tend to be women-centered to some degree, her prose is not romantic, hyperbolic, nor especially feminist in its discursive style. Malenfant Rouchy omitted information, surely, but what she presents contributes substantially to understanding the role gender played during events. Another author exposed avowedly gendered views.

As early as 4 September, Juliette Lamber Adam (1836-1923) and her friends discussed whether the events of the day would “lead to . . . a revolution,” or “a social disturbance, plunder” or other frightful actions.<sup>38</sup> Lamber Adam’s response was that, “no

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<sup>37</sup> Descaves Collection, International Institute of Social History (IISH), Amsterdam.

<sup>38</sup> Juliette Lamber Adam, *Mes illusions et nos souffrances pendant le Siège de Paris* (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1906), 8. Lamber Adam also wrote other books, including, *Mes angoisses et nos luttes 1871-1873* (Paris: Alphonse Lemerre, 1907), and articles in *Le Rappel* and other journals, receiving the notice

one wants social revolution,” that what “is in everyone’s heart is to defend France!”<sup>39</sup>

This discussion exposes that in these early moments of the new Republic, women actively discussed political and revolutionary events among themselves and no one was sure of the outcome. Lamber Adam indicated that she saw no evidence of threatening disturbances, no *pavés* raised to create barricades, and no pillaging, despite the approximately 100,000 National Guards moving toward the *Corps Législatif* and a growing crowd.<sup>40</sup> According to her, this crowd included large numbers of women from across the socio-economic spectrum of Paris.

The siege- and Commune-era accounts of Lamber Adam, a *bourgeoise*, have not drawn the same level of analytical attention as her other writings. Married twice, the second time to Edmond Adam (1816-1877), she was an influential republican *salonnière*, writer, and feminist.<sup>41</sup> Edmond Adam served as the Paris police prefect during the siege in 1870 and later, as a senator in the post-Commune National Assembly. Holding ideologically aligned views, Lamber Adam does not mimic her husband. However, her marriage to him granted her fascinating access to the private words of the men at the very center of political power in France, words that rarely appeared in print or other public records. Some have gendered her volumes as “interesting gossip,” but Lamber Adam

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and support of Victor Hugo. She has also been regularly cited within discussions of feminist thought in France during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>39</sup> Lamber Adam, *Mes illusions*, 9.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21.

<sup>41</sup> Her first marriage, to Alexix La Messine, created an ironic situation, in which the royalties from her very feminist writings were confiscated by her husband under Civil Code law. An attempt to prevent similar actions for a second edition of *Idées anti-proudhoniennes sur l’amour, la femme et le mariage*, through the use of the “pseudonym,” J. Lambert, proved unsuccessful. Husbands would have their privileges. Moses, *Feminism in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, 167.

employed her wealth of political and social contacts in ways that reveal an intimate knowledge of politics, the military, and the marginalized class status of women.<sup>42</sup>

Equally well-connected to significant women of her day, such as George Sand and Daniel Stern, she founded the *Nouvelle Revue* in 1879, editing it for eight years. She established a notably interclass municipal field hospital during the months under examination, and her writings emphasize her desire for emancipation of women from domestic isolation and gendered social judgments; in particular, Lamber Adam sympathized with socialists, revolutionaries, and the underclasses.

Lamber Adam notes the “informal, private, casual conversations, shared jokes, gestures, and rituals” of her life, but her volumes also describe public scenes involving more ordinary women in Paris, often unnamed.<sup>43</sup> In one case early in September, she describes a scene of women amassing on a square, asking, “What’s happening? Has there been any news?” and “What are they going to do?” One “wife of a worker,” stepped forward into the group and expressed her concerns. “You’ll see, the butcher of 2 December [Louis Napoleon] will need his blood yet! . . . the gendarmes will fire on us just like in 1851! At that time, on the Boulevard Montmartre, they shot a bullet, still lodged in my head.” As women and others listened, she added that she was shot when leaving her atelier at the usual time. Consequently, “they arrested my father [who was

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<sup>42</sup> Comte Paul Vasili, the original author of the phrase, was the pseudonym of Princess Catherine Radzwell (1858-1941). *France from Behind the Veil: Fifty Years of Social and Political Life* (London: Cassell & Co., 1914). For the potential significance of following “gossip” networks for historical analysis, see, Julia Clancy-Smith, *Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Populist Protest, Colonial Encounters (Algeria and Tunisia, 1800-1904)* (Berkeley: University of California, 1994), 3.

<sup>43</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *The Curious Feminist: Searching for Women in a New Age of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

attending her and also responsible for her whereabouts] saying that [no one] would be in the streets during the fighting unless they were fighting! The assassins!” The crowd surrounded her and she enumerated, one by one, “with hate-filled elegance,” all the faults of “Napoleon Petit,” after which, the crowd heartily applauded her.<sup>44</sup> Early on, women of many backgrounds and interests expressed their views about the pending changes, often linking them to events of 1848-1851. The memoirs of other women frequently comment on similar events.

Although claiming only to offer an account of her husband, Henri Regnault, and not leaving only “the diary of a woman,” Geneviève Bréton (1849-1918) wrote about the months between 4 September 1870 and June 1871.<sup>45</sup> A religious *bourgeoise*, Bréton never joined a feminist organization or collectively protested, but her writing highlights the injustices incumbent on the members of her sex category, as well as her analysis of “what it means to be a woman.”<sup>46</sup> Although her descriptions of the Parisian working classes are not always sympathetic, her charitable work frequently brought her into intimate contact with the poor and pregnant women of Paris, for whom she wished she could do more.<sup>47</sup> Bréton writes of her work at a municipal ambulance and soup kitchens, and her visits to the poor, the dying, the dispensaries, as well as the crèches. Bréton directly assesses the gendered nature of both private and public spheres, but her memoir also reveals numerous indications of this point, not analyzed by her. The bloody

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<sup>44</sup> Lamber Adam, *Mes illusions*, 16-17.

<sup>45</sup> James Smith Allen, ed., *In the Solitude of My Soul”: The Diary of Geneviève Bréton* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994), xxix.

<sup>46</sup> Allen, *In the Solitude of My Soul*, 116.

<sup>47</sup> For this subject more generally, see, Rachel G. Fuchs, *Poor and Pregnant in Paris: Strategies for Survival in the Nineteenth Century* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1992).



repression of the Commune, as well as the loss of her husband, left her angry with members of her own class whom she felt created the destruction she saw around her.

Augustine Alphonsine Malvina Souville Blanchecotte (1830-1897) wrote and published her *Tablettes d'une femme pendant la Commune* the year following the Commune, writing from seemingly conflicted viewpoints, which she found nonetheless compatible.<sup>48</sup> Born in Paris, she later assisted at the side of her republican father during events of 1848. Married sometime before 1850, her husband suffered an accident affecting his mental state in such a way that he was placed in an institution, leaving Souville Blanchecotte to raise her son. Generally describing herself professionally as, “Madame B. *ouvrière et poète*,” she had many contacts among republicans such as Lamartine, as well as *salonnières* such as Louise Colet. On one hand, Souville Blanchecotte believed, as a woman, she was above the political interests and stakes of men and therefore, like a photograph, could be “objective.” Simultaneously, she inconsistently implies neutrality is an illusion, seeming to understand that photographs have points of view, let alone other complicating, nonobjective factors. She offers her *Tablettes*, not as a (male) military or political history, although it certainly offers interesting analysis of both components; her work, for her, was an “*étude humaine*” that looks at life in Paris during 11 March – 30 June 1871, although Souville Blanchecotte regularly mentions earlier events. She clearly views women and men, poor and affluent, illiterate and educated, all as subjects within the category of *humaine*. Her occasional

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<sup>48</sup> A.-M. (Malvina) Blanchcotte, *Tablettes d'une femme pendant la Commune*, ed. Christine Planté (Tusson: Du Lérot, 1996[1872]).

and palpable disgust with the crudeness of the popular classes mingles with her analytical disgust with the bourgeois “*Amis de l’ordre*,” whom she found responsible for so much upheaval and violence. Her gender analysis is limited, although her descriptions of women’s lives and views offer current historians a rich resource for that analysis.

Eliska Vincent (1841-1914) produced a short manuscript and letters, outlining a long career of militancy and feminism.<sup>49</sup> Her father, “a republican from his youth,” and her mother, from her “Saint-Limoniens village near Condé sur Vergne,” raised Vincent in “a very advanced milieu,” which, according to her, encouraged her later activities from an early age.<sup>50</sup> The republicans of Asnières, including her parents, organized “discussion clubs” in 1848, at which she heard many women and men speak. One of Vincent’s uncles was arrested following June Days, later telling the tale of his harsh detention to Vincent; her father was arrested after the coup in December 1851 and later transported to Algeria. Her involvement in the “two months of history,” as she refers to the Commune, had its roots much earlier. She is credited with being the first archivist of the feminist movement in France. Until her death in 1914, Vincent called herself a militant, prioritizing her non-bourgeois form of feminism as a way to create social justice. In that sense, her brief manuscript indicates that she saw her Commune participation as part of that trajectory.

In 1879, Mme Céleste Hardouin, “*institutrice*,” self-published her memories as *La*

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<sup>49</sup> Bibliothèque Marguarite Durand (BMD)/ms168/d’Eliska Vincent; BMD/091VIN. Some information also is contained at the Archives du féminisme, including a mention of her role in founding a “*bibliothèque féministe*” prior to World War I, containing a particular emphasis on communardes. Vincent may well have written more, however, as much of those holdings – quite possibly including some of her writing – appears later to have been destroyed.

<sup>50</sup> BMD/ms168/Vincent, 1.

*Détenue de Versailles en 1871*.<sup>51</sup> Allusions to the months prior to her arrest in the aftermath of the Commune appear, but she directs her narrative to the months between that arrest on 7 July 1871 and her release in October of the same year. Her memoir pays particular attention to the months of her incarceration, rather than reflecting on the months of the siege and Commune. However, Hardouin's book offers relevant information, especially given her explanations of her actions during the Commune as well as her intimate contact with so many women in prison. Arrested in her classroom of girls and avowing no guilt, Hardouin clearly sympathized with communardes, and admitted to police that she had assisted at the Commune's *Club de la Révolution*.<sup>52</sup> Much later in her account, she admits that she "could not defend [her]self against the charges of being armed, defending a barricade, later abandoned, or of being in the clubs – all more or less true."<sup>53</sup> She, along with most of those accused, found herself the target of an anonymous denunciation.<sup>54</sup>

Her commentary on women's prisons, military and judicial procedures directed at women and children, and the lack of valid legal justification for numerous arrests provide a rich source for assessing the institutional role gender played. During her few months of imprisonment, she interacted with and observed many women whose ages, classes, religions, life experiences, and devotion to the Revolution varied widely, highlighting the

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<sup>51</sup> Mme C. [Céleste] Hardouin, *La Détenue de Versailles en 1871* (Paris: Chez l'auteur, 1879).

<sup>52</sup> Hardouin, *Détenue de Versailles*, 3.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>54</sup> Of the approximately 399,823 denunciations, only about 1/20 were signed. Although the Commune had outlawed anonymous accusations, they had a long history in France and elsewhere. Those known as *brassardiers*, wearing tricolor armbands during Bloody Week, led Versailles troops to those they believed "guilty," contributing to the role of denunciations, as well as summary executions. For a summary, see Noël, *Dictionnaire de la Commune*, 120.

gendered nature of their arrests and the procedures that followed. Writing in 1879, before amnesty for communardes, Hardouin maintained a gendered alliance with her status as a teacher of young girls, a wife, and mother of a (virtually grown) son. She weaves a sophisticated narrative of that status, discursively drawing less attention to her Commune-era words, political influence, and military association. As her discourse remains primarily within the context of her prison experience, in which the injustice of the process becomes grossly obvious, she often adeptly skirts earlier experiences that might have separated her from her accepted status of republican wife and mother. However, intriguingly, and whether intentionally subtle or almost involuntary, her Commune contributions surface occasionally with more than a bit of pride.

Charlotte Augusta Ritchie (1820-1878), whose letters written between 6 March – 9 June pepper this narrative, was born in London into a merchant father’s home, often lived in Paris, and “finished her education by a course of hard and deep study which few girls at that time would have gone through alone.”<sup>55</sup> Ritchie, like a fair number of middle-class women, remained single, taking care of numerous children of her extended family, who, for a variety of reasons, were committed to her care. Profoundly impatient with intolerance of many kinds, Ritchie suggests she had constant interaction with the poor, as she devoted her time to their needs, especially after deaths in her family left her alone in Paris. Although in London during the siege, Ritchie reentered Paris as soon as the gates reopened, living there during the Commune with Félicie, the “faithful servant”

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<sup>55</sup> Her memoir-from-letters, printed only for private circulation in 1879, was compiled by a male relative, but published as *Charlotte Ritchie: A Memoir* (London: Spottiswoode & Co.).

and former nursemaid to Ritchie's charges.

Within Ritchie's letters, Félicie serves as a regular commentator on events in the streets of Paris. Ritchie's gendered contributions to informal and private discourse reveal relationships with and perspectives of servants; they indicate the material sustenance these relationships could provide during tumultuous times, as well as an example of cross-class relationships between women. Combined with other accounts mentioning the commentary of domestics and the vendors with whom they had contact, Ritchie's letters provide a valuable resource. Ritchie's association, if not always alliance, with the working classes of Paris provided her many contacts among them. In 1878, Montmartre cemetery saw the burial of "our sweet Mère Angélique," with the poor present "in great numbers," and Catholics, as well as those from her English Church in the Rue d'Aguesseau, in attendance.<sup>56</sup>

Letters between mother and daughter, Madame Talbot, née Sédille (1821-1897) and Marie Talbot Delaroche-Vernet (1842-1889), as well occasional correspondence between them and other women, cover the months of 4 September 1870 – 27 May 1871.<sup>57</sup> Mme Sédille Talbot wrote from Paris, although Delaroche-Vernet wrote variously from Tours, Bordeaux, Nantes, and Versailles. When war was declared, Delaroche-Vernet's husband was *Troisième Secrétaire d'ambassade au ministère des affaires étrangères*, increasing her level of intimate knowledge of formal political events.

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<sup>56</sup> *Charlotte Ritchie*, 52-3.

<sup>57</sup> André Delaroche-Vernet, *Une Famille pendant la guerre et la Commune, 1870-71: Lettres* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1912). Just before the death of Mme Sédille Talbot, who outlived her daughter, she gave the letters to her grandson, André, who ultimately published the volume.

The letters reveal the day-to-day information shared by this mother and daughter during two events: the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune. The mother and daughter consistently discuss the political news of the day, including who holds what government position and diplomatic and military news regarding the Prussians. They describe the wife of a political actor acting “as much a minister” as the husband.<sup>58</sup> These women were among the class seemingly most desirous of separate spheres for women and men. Yet, while they appear aware of what is public or private information, as well as the formal divisions between political, military, social, and cultural subject matter, they seem unencumbered by them. They, as with Ritchie, also include what they heard from those providing services to their homes, as well as what their servants communicate to them. These discussions reveal the conduits of some of their less-official information. Paying attention to the intersections and merging of public and private space therefore increases the value of this set of letters.

The writings of other communardes and female observers not discussed here appear occasionally and their context surfaces at those points. Police records include not only statements made by women upon arrest or interrogation, but also letters, notes, and brief requests from a variety of women in Paris, occasionally hoping for particular relief, in exchange for their information. Sources by, and about, women and men who remained in Paris during the months of the siege and Commune remain the focus of this chapter. However, many people left the city prior to the gates of the besieged city closing. This created an opportunity for unification among residents against those who left. Reduced

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<sup>58</sup> Delaroche-Vernet, *Une Famille pendant la guerre et la Commune*, 89.

population also encouraged the call for women to defend the Republic.

### **September 1870**

Those who left Paris after Louis-Napoleon's surrender and capture on 2 September 1870, did so for a variety of reasons. Their treasonous absence served to rally all classes who stayed. About two million people inhabited Paris by the declaration of the Republic in 1870.<sup>59</sup> About 384,000 civic National Guards formed part of this population, and by the siege, another 72,000 regular army personnel were in the city. Serving as military governor of Paris and shortly to be named to the presidency of the Government of National Defense, General Louis Jules Trochu had denounced the disarray within the imperial army in an 1867 book.<sup>60</sup> Along with most other nineteenth-century leaders however, he preferred regular army troops to the National Guard, attempting not to arm them if at all possible.<sup>61</sup> The possibility of siege quickly caused part of the civilian population to flee. Over the course of the siege, the population decreased further due to chosen evacuation; death from disease, cold, and hunger; and the effects of the 12,000 shells the Prussians lobbed into the city.<sup>62</sup> As one statistical example demonstrating the effects of the siege, "nearly 42,000 more people died during

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<sup>59</sup> This estimate is common, although is based on a count of 1,825,000 in the 1866 census, and so is not exact. Becker, *Goncourt Journal*, 11.

<sup>60</sup> Trochu served as an officer in Algeria and in the Crimean War, becoming a general in 1866. He fell into disgrace in military circles with his publication, but was relatively popular otherwise, nominated as governor of Paris in August 1870, then to the presidency of the Government of National Defense in September.

<sup>61</sup> For one summary of government attitudes towards National Guard corps, see Becker, *Goncourt Journal*, 12. The challenges of going into battle during the siege, undertrained and underarmed, contributed to the view of the National Guards, the people of Paris, and others since, that the military leadership fighting the Prussians was inept.

<sup>62</sup> Shell numbers from Robert Tombs, "The Wars Against Paris," in *On the Road to Total War*, 545.

the siege than in the corresponding months of 1869-70.”<sup>63</sup> To endure the siege, especially if one had no other option, as was the case for most of the poor, meant a need to see participation as necessary and valiant, certainly a view the leadership of the Republic encouraged – while they quickly fled Paris for Bordeaux. The government’s official evacuation from Paris meant increased hardship for those remaining, as well as a general distrust among the working classes toward their so-called republican, representative government.

On 4 September 1870, Victorine Malenfant Rouchy walked to her home, allowing crowds of women, men, and children to pass as they converged on the Hôtel de Ville in Paris. Some women stuck flowers down the muzzles of the rifles of National Guards. She entered her apartment, happily bringing the news of the beginning of a new Republic to her husband and infant son. After eating, she and her husband entered the throng in the streets, bringing their baby with them to witness the historic day.<sup>64</sup> This action mimics one of 10 December 1848 when Malenfant Rouchy’s father, Pierre Malenfant, had brought her with him to the Hôtel de Ville when Louis-Napoléon had been elected President of the Second Republic.<sup>65</sup> Although her husband, Jean Rouchy, would shortly enlist in the National Guard, he initially joined a newly-organized battalion of *francs-*

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<sup>63</sup> Tombs, “The War Against Paris,” 549.

<sup>64</sup> Brocher, *Souvenirs d’une morte vivante*, 101.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.



*tireurs de la Loire* on 12 September, soon leaving his wife and her mother to provide for themselves and their child, in what would become a besieged city.<sup>66</sup>

A week before the city gates closed on 20 September, Malenfant Rouchy's mother agreed to care for a young child "for a few days," whose mother unexpectedly had to leave the city. When the gates closed, the two women had two children, ages eight months and three years, to care for during what was to become, not "a few days," but four-and-one-half months of siege and starvation.<sup>67</sup> Neither child would survive and Malenfant Rouchy's husband would not outlive post-Commune prison. However, the Malenfant women would endure the siege, the Commune, the violent repression of the Commune, a death warrant issued in absentia in the name of "Victorine Rouchy," almost two years working and hiding out in Paris in the wake of the Commune, and escape out of France. These women were not unique, especially in that they could not anticipate their trials from the vantage point of 4 September.

The early weeks of September 1870 generated revolutionary momentum months before the spring of 1871. The hasty and unexpected establishment of the Republic on 4 September 1870 served as a revolutionary act in itself.<sup>68</sup> Newspapers suppressed under Imperial reign virtually all reappeared by 5 September, and their hawkers, as well as busy cafés, contributed to a city-wide revolutionary cacophony.<sup>69</sup> Women and children appear

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<sup>66</sup> *Francs-tireurs* were guerilla troops, generally sharp shooters, allied with the government but unwilling to join regular army forces.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>68</sup> That the declaration of a republic served as a revolutionary act in itself is generally overlooked in assessing the later rise of the Commune.

<sup>69</sup> For café life in the era, see W. Scott Haine, *The World of the Paris Café: Sociability among the French Working Class, 1789-1914* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 218.

to have occupied the streets at least as much as men, with police records and the *affiches* produced by the government revealing women as a social class of particular interest to officials. The Government of National Defense, created in response to military defeat, the imprisonment of Emperor Louis-Napoleon, and Parisian demands for a republic, required women's support despite their disenfranchisement at the ballot.

Surfacing in posted proclamations and newspapers, the necessity of everyone's active participation in defense of the *patrie en danger* – especially in quickly-besieged Paris – became immediately apparent. Explaining the sudden existence of the new government, on 5 September a government-produced *affiche* declared: “In order to save *la patrie*, *Le Peuple* demanded the republic” linking legitimacy to the disembodied *le peuple*, which, in this case, primarily included Parisians.<sup>70</sup> The embodiment of this *peuple*, if not the voting opportunity, included women. Two days after the founding of the Republic on 4 September 1870, the Governor of Paris and President of the new Government of National Defense, General Trochu, posted in the streets of Paris that “each *citoyen* will draw inspiration from the great duties, imposed on *lui* by *la Patrie*” concluding that “the Government of National Defense counts on the courage and patriotism of *tous*.”<sup>71</sup> Women's contributions as part of the universalized terms, *citoyens*, *tous*, and *la patrie* had their counterparts in the particular. The conservative *Le Figaro* of 17 September 1870 indicated it would begin a column under the heading of *Les Parisiennes*, under which they would, each day, group letters from the women of Paris,

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<sup>70</sup> Murailles, I, 1. The demand for a republic was primarily situated in Paris, with government fears about Parisian crowds serving as a strong consideration in the declaration.

<sup>71</sup> Murailles, I, 19.

who “are impatient to demonstrate their devotion to *la patrie*.”<sup>72</sup> *La patrie* clearly needed everyone’s spiritual and material contributions. For women, however, conflicts arose between expanded public service obligations and women’s gender roles within families. During wartime emergencies, however, these conflicts could find some release.

Malenfant Rouchy offers insight reflective of women’s placement of the gendered organization of public and private at the forefront of a republic’s war effort. As part of the early organization of women in September, Malenfant Rouchy offered her services at the *mairie* in the VII arrondissement, the neighborhood of her residence. As not enough clothing existed to equip everyone in the National Guard, women organized work by and for women in the arrondissements. By 28 September, women all over Paris had formally organized themselves to produce clothing, food, and medical support for the National Guard and for Parisians more generally.<sup>73</sup> Significantly, Malenfant Rouchy describes the focus of this September project as “giving employment to women, whose husbands were at the ramparts or elsewhere,” although certainly it served the government’s military purposes too.<sup>74</sup> This organization did not exist prior to the republic’s declaration, despite the fact France had been at war. It also survived the siege, recreating the same conduits – and gendered priorities – of women’s employment during the Commune. Malenfant Rouchy’s employment aiding her household also brought material benefits to *la patrie*,

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<sup>72</sup> *Le Figaro*, 17 September 1870.

<sup>73</sup> Brocher, *Souvenirs*, 105. *Les Murailles*, I, 23 and 34, reveal that as early as about 7 September 1870, “Le Comité des Dames” announced they were accepting donations of money and materials to produce necessities for the wounded and the first official call specifically to women appeared on about 9 September.

<sup>74</sup> Brocher, *Souvenirs*, 105. By 4 October, later communarde, Louise Michel, had published a letter to *Le Rappel*, a Parisian newspaper, calling “Citoyennes” to help the Commission du Travail, of which she was a member, to find jobs for “le peuple de la République...pour sauver la patrie.”

even if perhaps the military government's leadership could see it the other way around.

Malenfant Rouchy's way of expressing the fairness of the distribution of work suggests her understanding of women's participation as universalized "persons" in the war effort. Her mother watched the children while Malenfant Rouchy made the military jackets assigned to her, limited to only three per week at four francs apiece.<sup>75</sup> Those twelve francs each week were to support four people. Malenfant Rouchy commented that "it was fair, in that there were a great number of *personnes* employed in this manner" and that ultimately all "would suffer, as thousands of *personnes* would not even have so much as that."<sup>76</sup> Her use of *personnes*, rather than *femmes*, in discussing the women "employed in this manner" suggests perhaps a conscious inclusion of women as ungendered contributors to the war effort, despite the fact that at this point she concerns her commentary only with women's labor. Additionally, she potentially links male household members to the "thousands" receiving aid from women's employment and who would suffer the future deprivations to which Malenfant Rouchy alludes in this passage. Her use of the universal, *personnes*, in both cases reveals the importance of September contributions by women as more than "women's work" within a gendered understanding of labor. Additionally, her mother's seemingly private, unpaid childcare, as well as Malenfant Rouchy's home-based labor distinctly overlap the public-sphere acquisition of employment and citizen service to *patrie*, deemed valuable by the

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<sup>75</sup> From Malenfant Rouchy's account, it appears that women overseeing the distribution, rather than *mairie* officials, limited the allotment. Whether the individual production limits were the same in each *arrondissement* and whether each *arrondissement* received equal distribution of materials remain undetermined.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

Government of National Defense. The Malenfant women continue to reveal the gendered organization of both public and private space, while also highlighting a moment when working women could articulate their contributions as ungendered *personnes*. The discourse produced during police questioning months later, expressed working-women's priorities, as well as political connections, from at least 4 September 1870.

Interrogation of Sophie Doctrinal, *Veuve Lemarchand, dite Poirier* indicates her verifiable political contacts and her reasons for public activities during the early days of September 1870. On 11 July 1871, the police questioned the childless forty-one-year old.<sup>77</sup> Her interrogator queried her about signatures, believed to be hers, on records of the *Comité de Vigilance des citoyennes républicaines* of the XVIII arrondissement. Poirier prefaced her response about the signatures by describing the Committee's purpose after 4 September 1870. She said,

Its goal was to come to the aid of unemployed women. I addressed my request to Monsieur Clemenceau, Mayor of the XVIII arrondissement, and to Monsieur Jules Ferry, Mayor of Paris, requesting authorization to establish ateliers [for women's employment]. Due to the absence of Monsieur Ferry, Monsieur Chaudy, who received [my request] and who approved my idea, sent me to Monsieur Clemenceau. He requisitioned for me, a location . . . from which I set up an atelier where I had about 70 ouvrières.

She name-drops, demonstrating her association with, and approval from, leaders who continued in good favor with the Republic from the early days of September through the date of her arrest. The police were interested in her Commune-era participation in this same Citoyennes Vigilance Committee, but Poirier made it a point to note the genesis of providing women with much-needed work. According to Poirier, her association with the vigilance committee was consistent, directly related to employment aims for women.

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<sup>77</sup> AHG/Ly23/4th Conseil de Guerre/101, Procès Verbal de Lemarchand (Doctrinal, Poirier).

Other sources document that in September 1870, the interests of government officials paralleled Poirier's priorities.

Municipal officials called for women's service as "improvised soldiers." On 12 September, the mayor of the V Arrondissement, J.B. Bocquet, called on the "Women of Paris" to create a committee in each neighborhood to outfit the ambulance corps that accompanied soldiers into the field. He likened their service to that of American women who had acted as "improvised soldiers" during the Civil War.<sup>78</sup> Bocquet closed with a fervent call to the women to give their time, money, labor, attentions, and hearts to this sacred cause.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, on 13 September, Mayor Bonvalet of the III Arrondissement made an urgent call to the "patriotism" of "*nos généreuses Concitoyennes*" quickly to organize themselves likewise. They were "to go street by street, house by house, floor by floor" in soliciting monetary and in-kind donations from residents.<sup>80</sup> Robert Tombs, in discussing workers cooperatives during the Commune, noted that during the autumn of 1870, the Government of National Defense encouraged the establishment of several producers' cooperatives, giving them contracts for making uniforms. He significantly adds that tailors' cooperatives gave work to about 35,000 people, mostly women working

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<sup>78</sup> *Murailles, I*, 43. Robert Tombs' singular chapter, "The Wars Against Paris," in *On the Road to Total War: The American Civil War and the German Wars of Unification, 1861-1871* is the only example of comparative analysis between the American Civil War and the civil war of the Paris Commune. Tombs does not address the issue, but anecdotal evidence suggests comparison of women's involvement in both events would prove fruitful, especially with the recent addition of Jane E. Schultz, *Women at the Front: Hospital Workers in Civil War America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

at home.<sup>81</sup> Though not mentioned by Tombs, if statements by Malenfant Rouchy, Poirier, and other working women have merit, women contributed oversight for the distribution of materials and work for substantial numbers of people. Male government leaders therefore directly called on women as patriotic citizens, using women's labor – paid or not – to further national interests in this time of crisis.

Gendering her explanations about her service, Malenfant Rouchy exhibited her citizenship when she described wanting to do more to help her *patrie*, in addition to making the jackets. Perhaps responding to a call from her mayor in the VII arrondissement, she states that in her neighborhood in her “free hours” she made bandages for the wounded, apparently for no pay.<sup>82</sup> She resolved to find out if she could help as an *ambulancière* and noted that if she did not have her mother and son to care for, she would have left with her husband in the *armée de la Loire*. Interestingly, she comments that staying in Paris, she “saw [her] dear little boy and [her] mother each day, not abandoning them in [her] service to [her] country.”<sup>83</sup> While indicating the love for family that a man might also exhibit, a man did not have to defend himself against “abandoning” his family while performing similar service. Her recurring mention of combining her responsibilities to family and country remind the reader of the gendered requirements of being a *citoyenne*, not a *citoyen*.

Serving as citizens made visible the gendered organization of women's lives. Her

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<sup>81</sup> Robert Tombs, “Harbingers or Entrepreneurs?,” 970. Tombs does not say how many of those 35,000 were the wives, daughters, and mothers of tailors, who – more than in most other trades at this time – tended to work alongside their men, or whether that number is in addition to those women.

<sup>82</sup> Brocher, *Souvenirs*, 106.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

mother cared for the children, but Malenfant Rouchy noted that although she had breastfed her young child, she “was obliged to use the bottle” so that she “could easily leave the house” without the additional problems and restrictions that breastfeeding entailed.<sup>84</sup> Although this necessary choice freed her to earn income and participate in the activities of citizens, later excerpts from her memoir suggest that it ultimately adversely affected the health of her child and more-quickly depleted the family’s savings, of which they had 300 francs at the beginning of the siege.<sup>85</sup> Even in better times, bottle-feeding in the nineteenth-century always put children at risk of death. Male citizens never had to make these choices in order to offer their service, though some surely had to determine whether they would employ bottle-feeding or a wet nurse when the mother of their children died. Given the unlikelihood of a man remaining home to bottle-feed a child full-time, either choice meant more labor for a woman – citizen or not. Malenfant Rouchy’s labor as a *citoyenne* demanded substantially different considerations than those of *citoyen* Jean Rouchy, for whom citizenship required he enlist in military endeavors. With a republic declared, women’s labor took on new meaning, meaning that could conflate demand for work with being a good patriot, wife, or mother. With a republic declared, demand for work also contributed to public, gendered expressions of anticlericalism.

Cheap convent labor presented women laborers an opportunity to exert their anticlericalism in a new republic. Though some women like Malenfant Rouchy had

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.



artisan skills, most working women could not realistically live on the salaries they received, either having to marry, set up an extralegal household with a man, or prostitute themselves for the “*cinquième quart de la journée*.”<sup>86</sup> Augmenting the problem, convents sold their devotees’ labor for at least 25 percent less than that of women workers outside the convent; convent work especially hurt seamstresses and linen makers, though many fields were affected. For some time before 4 September, these circumstances and the priesthood’s consistent preaching on the necessity of women’s resignation to gendered subjugation increased anticlericalism among *ouvrières*.<sup>87</sup> More broadly, anticlericalism, now having an officially republican forum, only escalated after 4 September.

One church supporter discursively argued for the conflation of 4 September anticlericalism with that espoused during the Commune the following March, rhetorically annihilating the significance of any divide between those dates. The re-establishment of freedom of speech and public assembly coincided with the declaration of the republic, leading to the creation of public venues in the form of clubs. This freedom would be retracted in January 1871 when threats of the Commune’s eruption were suppressed, not triumphing again until the Commune’s declaration on 18 March 1871. In theory then, this retraction of rights indicates a chronological divide between secular – even anti-clerical – expressions during the early days of the republic and those of the Commune. However, when prefacing Abbé Fontoulieu’s book on Commune-era clubs, Armand de

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<sup>86</sup> Marie-Thérèse Eyquem, “Les femmes au service de la Commune,” 327.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 326-7. Anti-clericalism accompanied republican and feminist appeals for women’s economic, social, and political equality since 1789.

Pontmartin linked those public forums to entirely different ones established with 4 September. He summarized the character of the “revolution of 4 September” and its clubs as one of “impiety,” and with the language chosen, discursively conflated the revolution of the Commune and its causes with a date preceding it by many months.<sup>88</sup> That the declaration of the republic was viewed by its enemies as the beginning of a revolution – rather than 18 March 1871 – suggests a rhetorical continuity, rather than divide between siege- and Commune-era events. The early days of the republic – not merely the later establishment of the Commune – offered women opportunities, not only to assemble freely, but to employ republican language asserting their value in being – and creating – citizens.

Given the state of war demanding unity of interests, women requested government funds, at times merging traditional charitable interests with citizenship goals. A letter from Emilie Lesnard to Mayor Malon of the XVII arrondissement on 16 September demonstrates this point. Lesnard wrote,

My daughter and I think that so many women have tried to help those who are suffering and of these, there is a large number of orphans. Our goal would be to . . . establish and continue an *orphelinat professionnel* in our arrondissement and under your patronage. We hope to make of these young girls, women imprinted . . . into *citoyennes*, worthy of France.”<sup>89</sup>

Lesnard does not indicate her class status nor whether she and her daughter have the skills necessary to do the teaching themselves. However, clearly they desire to embark on a project in which they previously have not taken part, despite the fact that Lesnard understands that “those who are suffering” have existed longer than the present war.

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<sup>88</sup> Paul Fontoulieu, *Les églises de Paris sous la Commune* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1873), i-xx.

<sup>89</sup> IISH/Descaves 32/Letters to Malon/d’Emilie Lesnard.

They request the legitimacy of republican political patronage, rather than enlisting religious or private aid. In this case, Mme Lesnard, along with her daughter, request to help make women, then *citoyennes*, out of otherwise bereft girls, perhaps saving them from either the convent or prostitution, although she does not mention so in her note. Work for orphaned girls – overseen by *citoyennes* – was to be their republican salvation. In the XVII arrondissement at least, the implication that employment skills would be a significant component of turning orphaned girls into productive *citoyennes* indicates the compatibility with republican values of women's labor outside the private sphere. The economic value of women's labor simultaneously provided national benefits. The labor of *citoyennes* contributed to one of the most memorable events of the early days of the republic: the escape in hot-air balloons of Leon Gambetta and others from Paris.

Women producing balloons used during the war – which became symbols of ingenuity and national pride – indicates another arena for their active involvement as citizen workers early in the new Republic. An image produced for *Le Monde illustré*, and reproduced elsewhere, shows the assembly line production of sixty-six hot air balloons, used in September and October to transport people and mail out of Paris. Women feature prominently in the image and description.<sup>90</sup> The hall of the Orléans train station was transformed into an atelier, overseen by the Godard family. Within the image, women appear to be in supervisory capacities in the large hall and Mme Eugène

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<sup>90</sup> Image and description from, Geneviève Sée, *Aujourd'hui Paris ou les 133 jours du siège 1870-71 par ceux qui les ont vécus*, 3, 136-7. Though full citation is limited, Sée composed this book using as many of her sources, the letters sent on these sixty-six balloons.

Godard directed the project as “chef de la couture.”<sup>91</sup> Men appear to work on the construction of the rigging and baskets, which were then attached to the balloons, but women occupy the rows of seats at tables, where the fabric for the balloons was patched together. Four completed striped balloons in varying colors fill the floor behind the work area. This image and its reproduction can be read in a number of ways concurrently, including describing actual events, as an ongoing symbol of citizen participation in a national emergency, and as a conscious or unconscious means to reinforce the equality of all citizen support. Here and elsewhere, the presence of laboring women minimally suggests them as early participants in the republic and its defense.

One woman, arrested after the Commune, argued that her initial involvement with the National Guard in September 1870 had to do with work, not military defense of either the republic or the Commune. Certainly these overlapped from the point of view of male political leadership – and the police who arrested her. A summary of Marie Schmitt, *femme* Gaspard’s Commune indiscretions accompanying a report to the Commission for Clemency Appeals on 11 July 1872, notes that, “Gaspard, during the first [Prussian] siege, was put into [paid] service by the National Guard as an equipment maker.”<sup>92</sup> The author followed this point with the information that “she later accepted a [paid] position as *cantinière* for the 101<sup>st</sup> Battalion.” Her eventual conviction was for, during the Commune, having “borne arms and worn a military uniform, and the use of those arms in

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<sup>91</sup> Sée, *Aujourd’hui Paris*, 136-7.

<sup>92</sup> AN/BB24/747, Demande en Grâce, Gaspard (femme), née Schmitt; 6<sup>e</sup> Conseil de Guerre, 11 July 1872: Rapport au Commission des Grâces.

an insurrectional movement.”<sup>93</sup> Although not specific as to the equipment she made nor at what point she became a *cantinière*, the sequence of employment corresponds to the path other women took from paid worker for the National Guard and other organizations in Paris in September 1870, to roles more related to or directly involving combat during the siege or later, the Commune. As with Victorine Malenfant Rouchy, women’s need for work at the dawn of this republic – and the republic’s need for *ouvrières* – provided a legitimate and necessary entrance into the revolutionary geography that would later incorporate the Paris Commune. In spite of this, early in the new republic even avowed socialists and later communards revealed their gendered misunderstanding of the term, worker.

Disregarding evidence to the contrary, male writers during the early days of the republic often universalized workers as male.<sup>94</sup> Félix Pyat, a future Communard, publicly posted what he wrote in *Le Combat* on 17 September, 1870. In bold type, “*Qui sait travailler sait combattre!*” links one’s work experience to an ability to fight for the new republic, seemingly disregarding – or including – the sex of any worker.<sup>95</sup> However, his call to “unity and action” among workers excluded women – if at first gaining their attention with the boldface. Among other rallying cries, the citizen-soldiers of his

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<sup>93</sup> AN/BB24/747, Demande en Grâce, Gaspard (femme), née Schmitt; 21 June 1872 Letter from 1<sup>e</sup> Division Militaire at Versailles to the Minister of War.

<sup>94</sup> For the broader context of this point, see especially, Joan W. Scott, “On Language, Gender, and Working-Class History” and “‘L’ouvrière! Mot impie, sordide . . .’: Women Workers in the Discourse of French Political Economy, 1840-1860,” in *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 53-67, 139-163. Also, Judith G. Coffin, *The Politics of Women’s Work: The Paris Garment Trades 1750-1915* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) and Louise A. Tilly and Joan W. Scott, *Women, Work, and Family* (New York: Routledge, 1989). None analyzes the upheavals of the era of the siege and Commune to any degree.

<sup>95</sup> *Murailles*, I, 63.

audience were called also to “defend the honor of [their] wives.”<sup>96</sup> Given its presence in a newspaper and on the streets of Paris, at least some women, and possibly quite a few, heard or saw this statement. No corroboration has yet surfaced that might determine if women viewed Pyat’s proclamation as inclusive of their interests or if their initial reaction to the absurdity of a universal call that seemed to exclude them was to point that out. Nonetheless, *ouvrières* such as Victorine Malenfant Rouchy, Marie Schmitt Gaspard, and female balloon makers reveal workers-as-women answering the on-going calls to “save the Republic.”<sup>97</sup> They served in many capacities, patriotic and otherwise, bringing the incompatibility of gendered assumptions about their status as workers into stark relief on the production floor, if not always in discourse. However, discourse was changing too.

A 25 September early call for the establishment of *La Commune*, published on the streets of Paris, notes its possibilities as a “new mode of organization . . . needed due to the urgency” at hand.<sup>98</sup> It called for a “Municipality elected by universal [male] suffrage” and “identical to the constitution of the Republic of the United States.”<sup>99</sup> Using Christian and republican references, the author offers the Commune as the means by which problems facing the city – and France – could be solved, especially those related to war against the Prussians. No consistent published appeal for the more radical changes the Commune implied would come to fruition until the end of October 1870 – and no

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

official changes occurred until March 1871. However, this public call indicates the early association of the Commune with further alterations to the republic, as well as the increased possibility for changes, indicated by the urgency of the times. September carried with it the impetus of a current and future revolution.

Geneviève Bréton, writing in her journal in September 1870, articulates her understanding of the “revolution” now attending Paris, as well as the conflicting expressions of those around her, which marked that day. As a religious republican, she was neither what Carolyn Eichner would call a feminist socialist, nor especially secular in her understanding of the world. However, she understood the discursive and practical limits placed on her sex, analyzing and often disputing the sexism of those limitations. She also had more than a passing sympathy for the plight of workers, especially the working poor, seeing the propertied classes as having created many of the problems affecting workers and those increasingly making up underclasses of the proletarian ranks. In that sense, she offers keen observations during the months under analysis. On September 4 she wrote, “Since this morning, I’ve seen many men in tears. And all the women, even my sisters, are much afraid of the rabble in white smocks shouting as they pass, fighting with stones like children, pulling down eagles, remnants of the empire, and nothing else.”<sup>100</sup> Later on the same day, she added, “Never was a revolution (for it is one) accomplished more peacefully. No shots [were] heard, not a drop of blood shed . . .

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<sup>100</sup> Allen, *The Diary of Geneviève Bréton*, 114.

the National Guard is fraternizing with the troops.”<sup>101</sup> Parts of Bréton’s description could virtually pass for one of 18 March 1871, however, she holds 4 September as a starting point for revolutionary changes, later indicating her perceptions of the limiting effects of her sex category.

Strongly wishing to help in the defense of her city, Bréton promotes her view that women are especially thwarted in their potential contributions. Uniting men and women in a wartime quest, Bréton writes, “Everyone who visits us is resolved to defend Paris to the end . . . let those who fear depart . . . the real Parisians, like us, will stay in Paris and defend it, to die with our town.”<sup>102</sup> She does not let pass, however, gendered biases, to which Félix Pyat seemed oblivious. Bréton ponders, “to be able to do, and to do nothing . . . to be aware of the ability and to feel the desire and the will, and yet to remain with tied hands, that’s what it means to be a woman . . . I can fight, but my sex precludes me from [it].”<sup>103</sup> Bréton’s journal reveals she did not exactly “remain with tied hands” during the next months. Still, her sex category – more than her class, work skills, or political effectiveness – feels the most limiting to her, though certainly her gendered limits included those of class, skills, and political effectiveness. According to Bréton, male and female visitors held similar resolve to defend Paris – now part of a republic. For Bréton, however, the squandering of women’s abilities, desire, and will when extreme need seemed to demand their utilization, appeared neither fair nor necessary.

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 114. Bréton’s own parenthetical statement here reminds her reader that she is not using the term, revolution, casually, but intentionally.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 116.



Bréton, like other women from a range of social categories, nonetheless responded to the overnight political and military events brought by the republic of 4 September.

Letters sent between Mme de Pressensé, a Protestant *bourgeoise*, and other women also indicate women's immediate interest and involvement in wartime events.<sup>104</sup> Founder of a Sunday School on la rue des Fourneaux in the XII arrondissement, married to a doctor, and a new grandmother, in a letter of 16 August, Pressensé notes her desire to join her husband as an *ambulancière*. However, her daughter still needed her help after a recent birth.<sup>105</sup> Alternately, she was grateful to have received her husband's permission to arise early so that she could work at the distant Batignolles Parish in the XVII arrondissement by 5AM. In this capacity, she became familiar with the views of the communist International from those she helped in the Parish, having also read widely, including the works of John Stuart Mill and *La Révolution de 1848* by Louis Blanc.<sup>106</sup> Six days following the republic's declaration, already Mme de Pressensé's "household is in pandemonium, as [she] has taken in 20 children, [war] refugees from Nanterre . . . as well as some young girls whose parents left Paris . . . and five Mobiles (servicemen) from Bretagne. The girls are staying in Paris so they do not lose their jobs."<sup>107</sup> At least twenty-seven additional souls occupy Pressensé's home, virtually overnight. Pressensé, as with Bréton, does not represent working-class women, but their efforts bring them further in contact with people from those ranks as they provide service in defense of their

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<sup>104</sup> IISH/Descaves/"Lettres de Mme de Pressensé" (Extraits), 4/1870-7/1871. Some of her letters of this era were eventually published in *Révue Chrétienne* in January, February, March, April, July, and August 1908, though I have yet to find any reference to her first name.

<sup>105</sup> IISH/Descaves/"Letters de Mme de Pressensé," 702.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 700-701.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 704.

city and nation at the declaration of the republic. Additionally, women often integrated that service with their gendered family responsibilities, also asserting their immediate desire to labor in the cause, sometimes aiding women and children in particular. Though preceding it, Pressensé's housing of refugees reflects an example of a call from the Government of National Defense.

The spontaneous, as well as government-encouraged, housing of refugees depicts a material aspect of the war and oncoming siege especially affecting women. At about the same instant that Malenfant Rouchy's household expanded to include a new member, Pressensé opened hers to various components of the refugee population. Incomes meant to care for a certain number of people, suddenly encompassed the needs of more. A city government *affiche* of 15 September reads, "The *Mairie* is invaded daily by distressed families, escaping the enemy. Women and children arrive in large numbers, having left the land of their fathers, sons, husbands and brothers . . . these families having no resources come asking us for bread."<sup>108</sup> Attendant local government requests for accommodations and foodstuffs for refugee women and children imply a call to and response from women in particular, a call that the Malenfant women and Mme de Pressensé, among many, met.<sup>109</sup> These were not parish or routine social charity requests, but the urgent demands of a city government. Under the banner, "*La Misère est grande! Bien grande!*" and within a developing republic, government leadership requested its

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<sup>108</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/pfIII/folder 3.

<sup>109</sup> Calls went out to women outside of Paris for similar accommodations for refugees, although not a subject here. See BMD/Descaves/Information on and letters by Caroline de Barrau de Muratel to André Léo.

*citoyennes* to respond to their calls.<sup>110</sup> Some economic demands placed on women were less visible.

A journal by Joseph-André Vignix exposes hardships created by the war. In an unpublished manuscript covering 26 October 1869 to 21 May 1871, Vignix, originally from Belgium, notes the suffering in Paris resulting from the war with Prussia in the early days of the Republic.<sup>111</sup> He wrote that the economic devastation, even before the siege, had affected “above all, the working class and the *petits commerçants*.”<sup>112</sup> He comments that mandatory enlistment of virtually all men between the ages of 25 and 45 had closed many businesses, including those making artificial flowers.<sup>113</sup> Vignix’s particular interest in this prominent endeavor of working women in Paris is ongoing, though not contextualized. As one example, earlier in Vignix’s journal in 1868, he notes having sent a box of artificial flowers to the Austrian Empress.<sup>114</sup> Although he does not represent women’s perspectives, his comments are nonetheless telling of women’s lives, although invisibly so without further analysis.

Within the artificial flower business, women were by far the most common workers, therefore in this case, by far the most affected by those business closures. Dominating the industry long before 1871, over 6,000 women were employed in making

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<sup>110</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/pfIII/folder 3. Hospitals, soup kitchens, and other religious-based charity services rendered aid early on, but the Government of National Defense and Parisian authorities, which sometimes overlapped, do not appear to have called on them directly. During the Commune, when supplies sent from England after the siege were discovered in the basements of churches, communardes claimed priests and nuns had intentionally hoarded them.

<sup>111</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/ms: Vignix, Joseph-André, 1869-1871 “Livre de mémoire souvenirs et observations remarquables.” Page number references are my own.

<sup>112</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/Vignix ms., 27.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 10.

artificial flowers by 1870.<sup>115</sup> While Vignix's entries take note of the closings, the thousands of women working in the shops and doing home-based piecework remain ignored, perhaps invisible to him. Vignix's class status and interest in the industry, although intersecting working women's interests, did not duplicate them. The fact all men between 25 and 45 were subject to military service created, not just commercial shortages, but reduced income for women's households, even if some of them received a bit of income from men's low wages in the National Guard or other divisions of the military.<sup>116</sup> Artificial flower making provided a better income to women than most other employment (often with the flexibility to work in the shop or from home). The sudden closures meant these women, with now-absent male household members, found themselves with no way to replace a sizeable portion of their household income. Under these circumstances, the most vulnerable component in the labor force – working women of all ranks – felt the profound “sufferings and misery” more than Vignix himself acknowledges.<sup>117</sup> These sufferings would increase over the siege, but the declaration of the republic and the war that germinated it immediately affected women's economic

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<sup>115</sup> Noël, *Dictionnaire de la Commune*, 171. See also Marilyn J. Boxer, “Women in Industrial Homework: The Flowermakers of Paris in the *Belle Epoque*,” *French Historical Studies* 12 (1982); and Judith A. DeGroat, “The Public Nature of Women's Work: Definitions and Debates during the Revolution of 1848,” *French Historical Studies* 20, No. 1 (Winter 1997): 32-3. Although post-Commune statistics are employed relative to the artificial flower business, Coffin's, *The Politics of Women's Work*, 148-158, demonstrates the avowedly working-class make-up of this field during the early Third Republic.

<sup>116</sup> As of late September 1870, the payment to a National Guard member was assessed at 1 franc 50 centimes/day. It was initially offered only to those men who had no other income, which certainly was not uncommon among the working classes. Given the economic circumstances, this was literally a life saver for many. An additional comment attached to the original announcement regarding pay remarked that everyone should remember that “the wives, children, elderly, and the sick need care as well and it would hardly be patriotic [for a man] to accept [the money], unless it was absolutely necessary.” See NWU/pfII, folder 10, “Indemnité à la Garde Nationale.”

<sup>117</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/Vignix ms., 28.

status in gendered ways. Vignix's journal connects the months of September 1870 through May 1871.

His manuscript begins over ten months before the events of early September 1870, but Vignix includes 4 September 1870 – 21 May 1871 as the most significant component of his writing, demonstrating a holistic interpretation of those months. During the fall of 1870, Vignix, a music composer and *Chevalier de l'Ordre de St Joseph-de-Rome*, served in the National Guard. During those months, he served along with, although not necessarily in the same capacities as, shoemakers and day laborers, doctors and roofers, united in defense of his adopted *patrie*. He voluntarily enlisted during the siege, proud enough of his service during *La Débâcle*, as Émile Zola termed events, to include in his manuscript a photograph of himself in uniform.<sup>118</sup> He will not heed the same call at the declaration of the Commune, though most of the working men he served with – and some of their flower-making household members – will. For Vignix, the end of the siege provided an end to his military service; however, his memoir does not end until 21 May 1871, the day troops entered the city to quell the Commune. Although he found himself unable to support the Commune, he kept a discursive continuity throughout events. Visual images accompany other accounts, in addition to Vignix's.

Visual images contributed to discourse promoting the defense of helpless women and children from Prussians, though women's attitudes did not always reflect victimhood discourse. Art historian, John Milner, identifies Gustave Doré's, *The Overturned Cradle*

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 34.

and a 30 January 1871 Daumier lithograph depicting dead children inside a home as two examples of a larger trend of sentimental rhetoric suggesting real men must violently protect women and children – whatever their political views.<sup>119</sup> This approach was designed to unite all males as *citoyens* – much like Pyat’s call for worker-fighters – in defense of those females and other minors they protect. However, it was poorly designed to unite or even accommodate the rhetorical and actual effectiveness of active *citoyennes*. Impressionist artist, Berthe Morisot of Passy wrote to her sister Edman Morisot on 25 September 1870, “Would you believe that I am becoming accustomed to the sound of the cannon? It seems to me that I am now absolutely inured to war and capable of anything.”<sup>120</sup> Mme Delaroche-Vernet, writing to her mother from Paris, said that she was “making bandages” and preparing to defend Paris, suggesting that if a particular male friend was actually wounded, he should “get himself moved here as he doesn’t have any women nearby.”<sup>121</sup> Here, she specifically associated women with wartime medical care. Her mother had written two days previously from Saint-Pair, also commenting on events and her fortitude.<sup>122</sup> As with Malenfant Rouchy, Bréton, and Pressensé, these women were not passive or helpless. Morisot and Delaroche-Vernet responded to the personal threats of war with defiance and practicality, as their national and city leaders had publicly requested of *citoyennes*.

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<sup>119</sup> John Milner, *Art, War and Revolution in France 1870-1871: Myth, Reportage and Reality* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2000), 83.

<sup>120</sup> Milner, *Art, War and Revolution in France*; 114-115. Morisot (1841-1895) was a French Impressionist who was the daughter of a government official and granddaughter of Rococo painter, Jean-Honoré Fragonard.

<sup>121</sup> Delaroche-Vernet, *Une Famille pendant la Guerre et la Commune, 1870-71*, 48.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

Wartime, and especially the Paris siege, defied a passive, *sujet* position for women, perhaps especially working women. Most working women possessed a myriad of skills especially useful in household or local emergencies, even as they might remain a suspect group.<sup>123</sup> Definitions of the private sphere accommodated women's gendered skills, which included local knowledge drawn from the practices of daily life. This knowledge now gained increase value in the public realm. An artificial-flower maker could know who had the cheapest meat, what price a secret could bring, where one could procure an abortion, and which bureaucrat – for 5 minutes of her time – could cut red tape. In public defense of her nation, the same flower maker could be called upon to turn in the hoarder, get information on the neighbor hiding a recalcitrant draftee, know who had a bit of healing knowledge that might help the wounded, and know which bureaucrat was subject to extortion or treason. Women as passive and helpless victims were still useful rhetorical tools, but if Paris had only victims among its female population, the city could not survive.

Artistic renderings, unpublished and published, depict women's significant and acceptable position as defenders of children and honor – personal and national – indicating an expansive, not limited, role for *citoyennes*. A drawing by A.P. Martial in an unpublished work he entitled, “*Les Femmes de Paris Pendant le Siègle*,” includes images

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<sup>123</sup> At least one historian has argued that women can occupy a suspect class precisely because they can possess gendered skills in common – skills that make all women suspect as a whole and which are needed, but not possessed, by those in a gender category holding more power. Carol F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1998), 42.

only of women.<sup>124</sup> A professional artist, known for his almost photo-like precision, Martial kept dry, precise, and generally non-judgmental notes about quotidian activities in Paris from 18 September 1870 through 28 May 1871; these notes included his drawings.<sup>125</sup> Although Martial does not identify by name the women in his artwork, features are realistic, the women depicted are not similar in appearance, and the clothing they wear indicates an appropriate consideration of material realities. As such, his drawings indicate an attempt to depict women as they appeared, rather than grotesquely stylized representations, although they still may have “represented” his overall perspectives of the “Women of Paris During the Siege.”

In September 1870, a proper woman could shoot and kill, earning the title of “blessed genius.” In one drawing by Martial, behind the barrel of a cannon and with a bomb depicted in the upper left corner of the picture, a woman sternly looks toward the viewer, with three young children close by, drawn with serious, even concerned faces. (Figure 1.1)<sup>126</sup> With the words, “the enemy!” written overhead, the handwritten narrative names them “survivors” of the Germans’ attacks and argues that “all of these [surviving] women rival each other in charity, courage, and sacrifice.”<sup>127</sup> In an 1872 book by Paul and Henry de Trailles, titled, *Les Femmes de France Pendant la Guerre et les Deux*

<sup>124</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/pf6: “Etchings,” AP Martial’s “Les Femmes de Paris Pendant le Siège.”

<sup>125</sup> A.P. Martial was Adolphe-Martial Potement (1828-1883), who altered his name to avoid confusion with his artist brother. In 1982, Paris publisher, Editions Entente, released a bound version of AP Martial’s, *Paris pendant le siege Paris sous la Commune Paris incendié*, which includes some background material. See “Note de l’éditeur.” See also, Janine Bailly-Herzberg, *L’eau-forte de peintre au dix-neuvième siècle: la Société des Aqua-fortistes, 1862-1867* (Paris: Librairie Léonce Laget, 1972). His siege-era work highlighting women remains unpublished.

<sup>126</sup> NWU/Siege and Commune of Paris/Etchings/pf6: A. P. Martial, *Les femmes de Paris pendant le siege*.

<sup>127</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/pf6/3.



*Sièges de Paris*, an opening illustration depicts a well-dressed woman with a child at her skirts, shooting a Prussian with a revolver, and another Prussian dead on the ground. In this case, the authors wrote that, “Women were, in all eras of our history, the blessed geniuses of France, as well as its glory.”<sup>128</sup> None of these men later equated women’s similar actions during the Commune as valiantly acceptable. Rather, their descriptions and commentaries limited themselves to women’s active participation during years and months preceding 18 March 1871, with a particular focus on the early days of the republic and its accompanying siege. The glory of the Republic was, for the Trailles, embodied in a woman defending herself, children, and the republic by firing a weapon of war. Outside the realm of artwork, women’s contributions also drew attention.

Those men (and perhaps women) working for Mme de Pressensé, showed compassion for the fiscal challenges of running her now-crowded household. I have found no examples of male writers of memoirs or letters noting the challenges of their female-run households in the early days of the Republic. A couple of them nonetheless complained about the quality of food their servants were able to attain as the siege progressed. Pressensé wrote that as early as September, their *porteur d’eau* was so moved after seeing the five beds for the Mobiles, that he refused to let her pay him. He responded, “No, you pay me later, if you can; at this moment, there isn’t much money and you have enough expenses. I will bring you all the water that you need during the

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<sup>128</sup> BHVP/115 250/ Paul and Henry de Trailles, *Les Femmes de France pendant la guerre et les deux sièges de Paris*, Hadol, illustrator (Paris: F. Polo, 1872), 1.

siege and we will see [about payment] afterwards.”<sup>129</sup> Whether the man was particularly moved by her housing of the Mobiles, as opposed to the more than two dozen women and children in her home, or whether he may have only been aware of the five due to their location, possibly near the kitchen entrance, is not fully clear. Nonetheless, Mme de Pressensé appreciated and accepted the offer as a means to mollify the increasing financial challenges of running a household, a woman’s responsibility, during these trying times. She adds that those supplying other goods to her household had given her “credit at regular prices, and some at even lower prices,” that there is a “spirit of *fraternité*, of generosity.”<sup>130</sup> Unlike those of Joseph-André Vignix and other men, women’s commentaries such as Pressensé’s, reveal their interests in, and responsibility for, the material and financial well-being of households – no matter the income level. This commentary reveals that others took notice. These household interests colored and expanded, not limited, women’s varied participation in the new republic. Some women had observed and participated in republican endeavors long before 4 September.

Somewhat like Victorine Malenfant Rouchy, Eliska Vincent’s writings demonstrate her early familial interest in revolutionary republican change. Vincent writes of her father, “a Republican from his youth,” who participated in meetings of republicans and socialists in Asnières, her early home.<sup>131</sup> As a young girl, she observed these meetings, some of them attended by Jeanne Deroine, whom she said, “went to the

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<sup>129</sup> IISH/Descaves45/Lettres de Mme de Pressensé, 704.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> BMD/ms168/d’Eliska Vincent, 1. (14 pages; page numbers my own.)

clubs every day . . . reclaiming that the equality of women must be the law.”<sup>132</sup> Clearly leaving an impression on Vincent, arguments for women’s equal inclusion in a republic spurred her participation when seismic political shifts began in the late Second Empire. Vincent directly links the development of republican opposition in France after about 1865 with the 1868 creation of the group, “*Revendication des droits de la femme*,” noting its early attempts to found secular schools (particularly for girls) in Paris.<sup>133</sup> This later *communarde* does not appear as a subject in historical treatments of women’s nineteenth-century involvement with republican changes; however, her memories provide important corroboration.

As Vincent argues, when the Second Empire relaxed its restrictions against public meetings and the press in 1868, women and issues significant to them became the subject of regular and public debate. The inclusion of “*revendication*” in the name of the women’s organization, however, indicates women’s awareness that their arguments had a much longer history.<sup>134</sup> Vincent – and others since – linked that history to moments of republican upheavals. This reclamation in the late 1860s, witnessed by Vincent, then intensified by the change of government in September 1870, merged women’s formerly private interests in a republic onto a public, political stage.<sup>135</sup> According to Vincent, prior to 4 September, the 1870 war initially inhibited the ongoing development of the

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>134</sup> David A. Shafer, “‘Plus que des ambulancières’: Women in Articulation and Defence of Their Ideals During the Paris Commune (1871),” *French History* 7, No. 1 (March 1993): 89. Although this conference paper primarily analyzes information from the *Illustrated London News* and secondary sources, I agree with the particular conclusions included above.

<sup>135</sup> Shafer, “‘Plus que des ambulancières,’” 93.

*Revendication des droits de la femme*. With that date, however, and before the collapse of the Commune could silence it altogether, it regrouped.<sup>136</sup>

Vincent wrote that September 1870 brought the fruition of women's "dreams of getting together to discuss the national defense which absorbed the thoughts of everyone."<sup>137</sup> Women arranged to meet for discussion in the private school of Mme Eugenie Pottiers, one of the teachers who had been chosen for the secular school in previous times. Vincent corroborates Louise Michel's later published mention of women's significant participation in an 18 September rally in support of the city of Strasbourg – a city already fallen to the Prussian army.<sup>138</sup> On the same day in September, another group of women on the Place de la Concorde marched to the Hôtel de Ville, with André Léo and the eventually infamous Louise Michel at the head.<sup>139</sup> In all cases, these public meetings and demonstrations supported continued republican military action against the encroaching Prussians. This goal countered the fear of capitulation of Paris and France, foreshadowed by Louis Napoleon's recent surrender at Sedan. Descriptions of these September events also demonstrate *citoyenne* interest and involvement in the public male arenas of politics and the military, early in the new Republic. Women witnesses, such as Vincent, corroborate accounts of other women.

This corroboration indicates a distinct association between the development of the new Republic in September 1870 and a greater assertion of some women into the

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<sup>136</sup> BMD/ms168/d'Eliska Vincent, 5.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> BMD/ms168/d'Eliska Vincent, 6; Louise Michel, *Histoire de la Commune* (Paris : P.-V. Stock, 1898), 74.

<sup>139</sup> BMD/ms168/d'Eliska Vincent, 6.

“universal” (male) arenas of republican citizens. Malenfant Rouchy declared that the proclamation of the Republic in 1870 was “the treasured dream of [her] childhood,” which she was now going to realize.<sup>140</sup> The national call for the labors, means, and supportive rhetoric of women legitimized, to some extent, this assertive position. Public proclamations allowed women to assert themselves as part of, not excluded from, the terms *citoyens* and *tous*, on whom the salvation of the *patrie en danger* depended. However, men have provided the focus of these early days of September, given the abundance of their authorship, disconnecting this moment from the future development of women’s actions during the Commune.

Women’s records suggest the need for continued critique of the perspectives of at least some prominent male writers of the era. In her published memoir, Victorine Malenfant Rouchy, writing specifically to defy the words of men such as Alexandre Dumas, *fils* and others, takes on Edmond de Goncourt, one of the most renowned bourgeois record-keepers during the siege and Commune.<sup>141</sup> Goncourt’s emotionally-charged descriptions of “working girls,” and “women in Paris” fill his published writings well into the next century.<sup>142</sup> Malenfant Rouchy calls part of his record for 24 and 25 September “quite strange.”<sup>143</sup> She quotes him describing the wide variety of unappealing

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<sup>140</sup> Brocher, *Souvenirs*, 100.

<sup>141</sup> Becker, *Paris Under Siege, 1870-1871: From the Goncourt Journal*. Although the four-volume journal of Edmond and Jules Goncourt was not formally published until 1955, Goncourt published many works and was prolific in his newspaper and other accounts, especially as they relate to the siege and Commune era. *Journal: mémoire de la vie littéraire, Vols. 1-4* (Paris: Flammarion, 1956).

<sup>142</sup> *The Colour of Paris, Historic, Personal, & Local* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1908) provides extensive sections depicting women and girls in the post-Commune era. See especially the chapters, “Of the Faubourgs – The Working Class” and “Of Women in Paris.”

<sup>143</sup> Brocher, *Souvenirs*, 109.

canned goods in the shops of Paris. He “could never have thought this would be the food of the Paris rich,” adding despairingly that he had “eaten the last of the oysters yesterday!”<sup>144</sup> Malenfant Rouchy comments, “*Quelle infamie, Messieurs*, the rich of Paris no longer have oysters to eat! The rich of Paris are reduced to eating canned food, what irony!” She adds, “The poor of Paris don’t even spend time in front of the shops [looking at the offerings, as Goncourt had], as they have neither the time, nor the means,” that it “would be a luxury about which one would not even dream.”<sup>145</sup> Although the poor of Paris may very well have stopped in front of shop windows, Malenfant Rouchy asserts her class analysis, rather than a clear gender analysis of Goncourt’s words. However, Malenfant Rouchy’s personal experience reveals the gender component.

For women, procuring food for others, as well as their own households, was part of the gendered organization of both public and private space. Taking notice of how households procured food and who bought it also demonstrates women’s public visibility and importance during these weeks. At least by the Commune and likely before, Goncourt received some of his information from the “bread woman,” who was the first to tell him on 18 March that there was “fighting in Montmartre.”<sup>146</sup> The bread woman provided a consistent service to the household long before 18 March. Although the editor of Goncourt’s journal reflects Goncourt’s privileged male view when he writes that, “the siege of Paris was something of a joke for two months,” the records of Mme de Pressensé and Malenfant Rouchy’s rebuttal of Goncourt’s description indicate women increasingly

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Becker, *Goncourt Journal*, 227.

faced challenges finding food and other supplies early on. Soon, they stood in the queues women found waiting for them at the stores around Paris, even before rationing; the lines included domestic servants representing wealthier households. Artwork on ration cards and public announcements – perhaps both representational and realistic – regularly depicts women and children, not men, in lines outside stores.<sup>147</sup> Until November and December, those still in Paris and outside the ranks of the working classes evidently had their ways around some of the deprivations, including the option to leave. However, if chosen, this option often left servants and others dependant on employment by the upper classes even worse off, as Pressensé's mention of taking in several young women indicates. In wartime emergencies, the procurement of food took on added significance, bringing private consumption more visibly into the public realm. As the republic was declared, sex workers accustomed to the public milieu gained particular attention.

Although under police surveillance for decades, prostitutes received escalating attention from 4 September onward. The republic's declaration and its aftermath encouraged police to conflate prostitution with female "republican" participation in public political clubs, among other things.<sup>148</sup> Using statistics from his préfecture, C.J. Lecour, a *Chef de la Première division à la préfecture de Police*, detailed in his 1872 book, his ongoing concerns.<sup>149</sup> Virtually by definition of the term, these women,

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<sup>147</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/pf6: AP Martial. It appears that AP Martial, in addition to writing and publishing, may have been the artist who drew at least some of the ration cards during the siege, although I can not yet confirm this.

<sup>148</sup> A.-J.-B. (Alexandre-Jean-Baptiste) Parent-Duchâtelet, *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris* (Paris: Baillière, 1837) and Jill Harsin, *Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985).

<sup>149</sup> C.J. Lecour, *La Prostitution à Paris et à Londres 1789-1871*, 2<sup>e</sup> édition (Paris: P. Asselin, 1872).

classified as prostitutes, were poor. Lecour mentioned that exact figures were unknown, as the recent, Commune-era fires at the Préfecture destroyed many of the relevant records. Nonetheless he forays into his account.<sup>150</sup>

Lecour matched prostitutes and their “debauched venality,” with the clubs begun after 4 September.<sup>151</sup> He used as a brief example a police spy’s observation that, “a meeting [attended by prostitutes] began by singing the *Marseillaise*, with the objective, the extinction of prostitution!”<sup>152</sup> Evidently for Lecour, republicanism and the end of prostitution were incompatible – or equally absurd. For these women, they were aligned. He found equally outrageous the corresponding suggestion that “the intelligent organization of women’s work is the sole remedy for prostitution.”<sup>153</sup> The police saw prostitution as inevitable, and therefore, the women who provided sex work as essentialized deviants, not potentially – or simultaneously – productive *ouvrières*. Lecour and his spies did not limit their commentary to women’s appearance or the immorality of their nature and work, otherwise their written efforts might only provide representation etched in an emotional screed. Rather, police agents assessed the reasoning for women’s statements given during public meetings made possible by the declaration of the republic.

Police found the analysis incomprehensible – a reorganization of gendered labor? – but its inclusion suggests resolutions to problems that perhaps only marginalized

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<sup>150</sup> Although Bloody Week fires destroyed the Préfecture, communardes had burned files kept on prostitutes soon after 18 March 1871.

<sup>151</sup> C.J. Lecour, *La Prostitution à Paris*, 315, 321.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 321.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 325.



women understood. It also indicates that the prostitutes in attendance at this meeting saw prostitution as an economic imperative for them, implying a hope for change in a new republic. Police could not imagine that change. Women less associated with the sway of domestic male power held the eye of the male police during the fall of 1870, although noticeably not of their own choosing.<sup>154</sup> The arrests and convictions of later communardes reveal police observations of prostitutes and other working women long before the Commune. As one example, the percentage of women assigned to the category of *soumise à la police* in the “final” tabulation of women tried before the Councils of War was over 23 percent, despite the fact fires had destroyed relevant files, leaving little written evidence to support the siege-era classification of women in this manner – whether or not true.<sup>155</sup> Another 40 percent were “living in *concubinage*,” for the police, a category with implications of virtual prostitution.<sup>156</sup> Observations by Lecour and the police more generally indicate a heightened interest in their activities after 4 September.<sup>157</sup>

Receiving rations and going to grocers was *de rigueur* for women of all segments of the working classes, even if the categories of prostitutes and patriotic homemakers

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<sup>154</sup> For the Third Republic overall, see, Jean-Marc Berlière, *La police des mœurs sous la III<sup>e</sup> République* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1992).

<sup>155</sup> L’assemblée nationale, *Enquête Parlementaire sur l’insurrection du 18 Mars*, III, 309. Published in June 1872, this will be analyzed more fully in Chapter 5, but the original confidential notice of the total numbers of women and children tried before Conseils de Guerre, used as part of the cited numbers, is in APP/Ba365-5, dated 19 Février 1872. Given women were arrested and convicted after this date, the totals are ultimately inaccurate. I have found no analysis of this fact in the historiography. The tally of 1,051 women is always used in analyzing women’s trials.

<sup>156</sup> *Enquête Parlementaire*, III, 309.

<sup>157</sup> While I have not reviewed all police files for the early weeks of September, my summary includes an assessment of APP/Ba 362-3 & 4, covering 1-30 September 1870 and deemed by archivists as relevant to the “Commune de Paris (1871).”

remained distinct to Lecour and his police spies. A variety of women drew the attention of artist A.P. Martial, in some cases as they huddled together at the doors of grocers waiting their turns for rations and supplies, prostitutes likely among them. (Figure 1.2)<sup>158</sup> During the early days of the republic and throughout the siege, observers describe the queued women shoppers as valiant, as Martial indicated in his narrative accompanying the images. He wrote, “So that the young, the weak, the elderly – those who suffered so much during the siege – might live, the women did everything they could in order to find something to eat.”<sup>159</sup> The private and public focus on food acquisition allowed for legitimate entrance of women into public venues of developing events. Women often rendered their service to other women during the early weeks of September.

Geneviève Bréton’s diary reveals the desperation of many in Paris as early as 9 September and her desire to aid them, at times despite her husband’s demands on her time. Bréton regularly participated in charity, but appears to have stepped up her activities as the Prussians advanced on Paris during that month. She wrote, “with Sister Gabrielle I’ve been visiting the poor, the dying, the dispensaries, the crèches – all the women dying of hunger and other dreadful evils.”<sup>160</sup> She adds that at the *l’Hôpital Hôtel Dieu*, she “didn’t waste [her] day, for with a few silver pieces, I gave back some hope and confidence to a poor girl who hadn’t eaten for 24 hours and who was in despair – and

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<sup>158</sup> NWU/Siege and Commune of Paris/Etchings/pf6: A. P. Martial, *Les femmes de Paris pendant le siege*, 9. In this case, Martial uses the top part of a ration card to form a rubric over his artistic work.

<sup>159</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/pf6: Etchings, AP Martial’s “*Les Femmes de Paris Pendant le Siège*,” 10.

<sup>160</sup> Allen, *Diary of Geneviève Bréton*, 117.

[there are] so many others like her.”<sup>161</sup> Bréton’s commentary and service reflect problems of significantly longer term than either the Republic or the war against Prussia, declared in July. Her focus on women’s destitution, combined with her associated comments on women’s positions in society, however, reveal her gendered priorities, although she will ultimately tend the wounded men in the hospital as well.<sup>162</sup>

Interspersed with descriptions of her daily activities, are her comments on her husband, Henri Regnault, about whom she said the diary was to focus. On a day following 17 September and reflecting on another evening with her husband, she wrote, “If I go out for a moment, he fidgets and is bored. Probably he misses his toy.”<sup>163</sup> She never indicates she deems that inappropriate – perhaps she is even glad to notice his need for her. Her analysis indicates her husband’s concern was not for her safety, but her absence. Nonetheless, she continues her work, in fact, augmenting it over the coming months as the need increased likewise. Correspondingly, women multiplied their time in republican clubs.

Women’s participation in the republican *clubs rouges*, now held in public, often municipal, buildings, began with the new republic in September 1870. Gustave Molinari scrutinized the development of these clubs, noting that, “over the four-and-one-half months [of the early Republic during the siege], the revolutionary party didn’t stop for

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 146, dated 1 December 1870.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid., 120.

one moment in their attack on the government in their newspapers and in their clubs.”<sup>164</sup>

For him, it was “necessary to know what was said in these clubs and to reveal it to the public,” that “this photograph requires our attention.”<sup>165</sup> His use of the term,

“revolutionary party” makes the organization of those pushing for even more republican changes sound more formal than it actually was. Given Molinari’s attention to women in the clubs, he also links them with the “revolutionary party” and republican changes, as will Fontoulieu – the future commentator on Commune clubs – and police such as Lecour. The image of his work as a “photograph” implies a more static and “true” picture than was possible to give under the circumstances; his use of the term more accurately indicates the fact that a photograph provides only one view of the possible angles from which to see what is before the lens. However, the clubs formed a nucleus from which women and men developed their ideas and formulated future plans for change.

In his overall description of the clubs, before he goes through each one individually, Molinari almost immediately mentions the “motley group” that made up the public filling the halls, especially the women and children.<sup>166</sup> He commented on their lack of education, especially that “history, geography, the French language itself, daily receives terrible wounds” from the orators, despite a certain “natural eloquence” of a

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<sup>164</sup> M.G. (Gustave) de Molinari, *Les Clubs Rouges pendant le Siège de Paris* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1871), ii. Molinari, also editor of *Journal des débats*, covers only the siege era of the Republic, concluding at the end of January 1871. A section on the “histoire, organization, and physionomie” of these clubs was published in *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 1 Décembre 1870. He added a later footnote after the Commune that “a new and formidable revolutionary explosion has taken place in Paris. We would be remiss – and wrong – if we rejected the responsibility of the clubs” in these events.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, iv.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

few.<sup>167</sup> As early as 21 September, when the Club Blanqui organized on the rue d'Arras,

The popular element dominated the meeting, where the women were as many as the men. One citoyenne associated with the ambulances had been particularly applauded by the women in the auditorium, when declaring that she was ready to take up arms, which the seminary students had refused to take up in defense of the nation.<sup>168</sup>

According to Molinari, *citoyennes* of the working classes began publicly asserting their willingness to go beyond the demands of their male leaders in defense of their *patrie en danger*.<sup>169</sup> Whether in jest or descriptive of the language employed at the meeting – or both – Molinari calls the women attendees, “*citoyennes*,” and verifies women’s association with ambulance units in the early days of September. Tradition might dictate the appropriateness of women employing arms in defense of their homes, as Martial’s drawings suggest. However, Molinari’s observations reveal that evidently at least some viewed a *citoyenne*’s assertion of the right to carry arms as part of a duty to nation – especially when men proved unreliable or unavailable. These descriptions also indicate that, at least in some clubs and areas of Paris, women had as much interest in the subjects discussed as men.

“Motley groups” of women in attendance had the power to create the agenda in these ostensibly political meetings.<sup>170</sup> Women could not claim official “active” political status in 1870-71. However, in a post-Commune world, police will eventually refer to

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 29-30.

<sup>169</sup> Later chapters will more fully address women’s activities in the clubs of the siege after these early days of September, and during the Commune. As described later, many participants and witnesses attested to similar words and actions discussed here, although finding specific references to September is more challenging.

<sup>170</sup> Many women would later deny that their participation was “political,” even if admitting to attending these political clubs. Given that by definition, women could not be political, they were simultaneously telling the truth and lying. Most always, their judges believed them to be lying.

club women, among others, as “*détenus politiques*” as they sent them from their detention facilities to Versailles for trials.<sup>171</sup> On 25 September in a club *ambulant*, also associated with the name of Blanqui and meeting in a different room on the rue d’Arras, Molinari writes that the meeting was “composed almost exclusively of women, and [some] male workers.”<sup>172</sup> He notes that their subject matter addressed the quick increase in prices, that there was no milk to be had, and that charcoal was expensive but absolutely necessary in poor homes.<sup>173</sup> Goncourt’s cohorts may not have been facing provisioning problems yet, but many were. Additionally, Molinari reports that club participants proudly announced that, “vigilance committees have already been making visits to butchers and those selling firewood.”<sup>174</sup> He follows with an explanatory note that vigilance committees, which put unofficial pressure on non-compliant community members, were illegal. For Molinari, the supportive atmosphere for illegal activities that nonetheless aided poor people’s interests was disheartening, though the National Government found vigilance committees useful to some degree.

Vigilance committees included women and, for the time being, formed an unofficial enforcement arm of the Government of National Defense. Neighborhood-based committees reflected national government interests, which sharply discouraged hoarding or price gouging. Presently, the government accepted their roles with discomfort, but some of the same committee women would increase their pressure on

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<sup>171</sup> APP/Ba369/pf3. In this particular list, thirteen of the twenty-seven detainees requested were women.

<sup>172</sup> Molinari, *Les Clubs Rouges*, 35.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid., 37.

non-aligned community members, such as police wives or hoarders, during the Commune. Molinari closed his description of the *ambulant* club by noting Blanqui's solution to economic and distribution problems was to "ration everything for everyone and, as the [the universal, not only male] *citoyens* are the soldiers in this army camp, proceeds should provision the army."<sup>175</sup> Women – as part of this army of *tous* – found their interests acknowledged in the clubs and could interpret an icon's statement as inclusive of their citizen roles. Molinari's discourse suggests he linked women's gendered concerns with food and supply acquisition as well as their roles in vigilance committees, with Blanqui's "political" solutions to the same problems. He did not find women or Blanqui suitable agents for change, but his work is still valuable to this discussion.

Molinari's earlier preface and his choices for observation illustrate particular biases, which disinclined him to ally with his subjects and their views. However, for the most part his portrayals are not venomous, nor do they focus on "wild-eyed" descriptions of his subjects. His book indicates an interest in the female attendees at clubs, although he does not dominate his discussion with descriptions of them. His work seems to correspond with, but not duplicate, the surveillance of police spies, active during this era.

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid. Louis Auguste Blanqui (1805-1881), was a long time republican activist, military man, even revolutionary guerrilla. One of his newspapers, *la Patrie en danger*, launched just after 4 September 1870 and which reiterated his positions adamantly reviling the Government of National Defense, ceased publication on 8 December 1870, due to lack of funds. He led unsuccessful attempts to establish the Commune on 31 October 1870 and 22 January 1871. He was arrested on 17 March 1871, leaving him unavailable for service during the Commune, although Commune members hoped to exchange hostages for his release. He was condemned to deportation after the Commune, but due to his health was imprisoned at Clairvaux. When elected to the Assembly in 1879, he fought for amnesty for all communardes, which was granted in 1880.

Molinari and the police increased their attention to women's activities with the advent of the Republic, perhaps due to their increased visibility in now-legal public assemblies, but women likely paid as much attention to them.

Malenfant Rouchy verifies the constant police surveillance during the early days of September, suggesting both the perspective of police, as well as women's day-to-day awareness of living under its lens. In describing the proclamation of the Republic on 4 September she wrote, "Everyone appeared joyful that afternoon; only the police agents looked sad." Continuing, she explains, "[The police] were profoundly detested," adding to their fears while in the crowd.<sup>176</sup> She reports that, according to others, "two or three agents who had personal enemies were thrown in the water . . . but no one died."<sup>177</sup> Although not directly linking the police interests to women's activities on this day, Malenfant Rouchy's studied observation of the police, as well as her chosen descriptions, indicate the resentment towards police of all stripes exhibited by the popular classes of Paris throughout this era.

A police summary of a communarde's pre-Commune activities also reveals surveillance, so aggravating to working women. Long before Nathalie Duval, *femme* Lemel, was a communarde in the spring of 1871, the police observed her in the clubs after the capitulation in January 1871 and in other activities as far back as May 1870.

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<sup>176</sup> Brocher, *Souvenirs*, 100.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid. In Milliet's, *Une famille républicaine fouriériste*, Vol. IX, 29-30, the author wrote of that day, "several sergents de ville were disarmed" and the "crowd trampled their *tricornes*" or "threw them in the Seine, their swords twisted."



(Figure 1.3)<sup>178</sup> The police regularly monitored her – something they would later use against her at her trial and in her petitions for clemency. Their account within her appeal also indicates their frustration with her ability to avoid surveillance in 1870, indicating her awareness of their watchful eyes. The report, at times seemingly in defense of the spies' inconsistent tracking of her, goes to some lengths in its explanation of how she was craftily able to avoid their constant scrutiny. Nonetheless, the police maintained reports on her attendance in at least six meetings between 24 May – 27 June 1870, and an unspecified number of meetings in September – January 1871.<sup>179</sup> This example and others, including Lecour's book, document that police had long observed the working women of Paris. They served as a focal point for those men and the information they previously acquired would later serve their interests against communardes. Policemen did not see them as ungendered workers, suspects, or revolutionaries, but as female (workers, prostitutes, or revolutionaries), whose bodies, actions, and words could be dangerous.

Juliette Lamber Adam also noticed and wrote about women and the police on 4 September. In front of the Hôtel de Ville she described “women and children appear[ing] in the windows [of the Hôtel de Ville]; everyone was happy.” Except the police.<sup>180</sup> Lamber Adam used this sketch of Parisian unity – and police revulsion – as a backdrop on which to layer a description of her participation on this day. She spoke to a crowd

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<sup>178</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/ Nathalie LeMel; Available from <http://www.library.northwestern.edu/spec/siege/images/PAR00649.JPG> ; Internet; accessed 17 July 2005.

<sup>179</sup> AHG/Ly23/4e Conseil de Guerre/688: dossier Duval Lemel, Rapport sur l'affaire de la nommée Duval, Perinne Nathalie, femme Lemel (20 June 1872). Some information duplicated in AN/BB24/792: Demande en Grâce.

<sup>180</sup> Lamber Adam, *Mes illusions*, 31, 37, 39.

about the Republic – as an idea and a reality. She recounted her words as, “the Republic is neither a woman nor a divinity . . . the Republic is the greatest amount of courage, intelligence, activity, and growth that a people can produce. One does not decree a Republic; one makes it. Therefore, long live the Republic!” She then reminisces about the feeling of having heard the voices of thousands, echoing her cry.<sup>181</sup> Parisian crowds that Malenfant Rouchy walked through on 4 September not only contained women; according to Lamber Adam, some spoke and many in those crowds applauded the words and actions of at least one of them. As previously recounted, Lamber Adam and other members of the crowd paid rapt attention to another woman voicing her suspicions about potential violence, reminiscent of 1848-51. Crowds evidently rallied around women, as well as men, uniting Parisians against common enemies, something crucial to the National Government’s call, two days later, for the “courage and patriotism of all.”

Finally, May 1871 concerns about *pétroleuses* are nowhere evident in government decrees from interim President Trochu during the early days of September, despite officials’ later conflation of these days with incendiary acts. On 10 September, Trochu posted, “the forests, woods, and areas of the woods that might compromise the defense of Paris, will be burned.”<sup>182</sup> On 12 September, a follow-up decree ordered “everyone having stores of *huiles de pétrole* must declare it within 24 hours to the Office of the Director of Public Highways.”<sup>183</sup> This requisitioning of *pétrole* called on women and men to surrender a commodity, with which a few months later, women would be accused

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>182</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/SCPV-10: 10 September 1870.

<sup>183</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/SCPV-15: 12 September 1870.

of burning Paris. The famous Bois du Bologne on the east of the city initially was not burned. During the siege, women and girls fetched wood, much of it green, from those woods as the cold of winter and lack of fuel intensified. The practical and health challenges of trying to burn green wood indoors or of trying to find unavailable, requisitioned, or hoarded fuel oil, fell especially on women's shoulders, as the women in the Club Blanqui had angrily noted.

Poor women, including those who were domestic servants, often carried pails of charcoal, ash, and cooking and heating oil, a simple act with long-term repercussions. The black soot and other remnants from those items could remain on their hands and clothing for much longer than the time it took to transport or work with the fuels and their remains. While innocuous, even demanded, by September's government, during the time that demonic *petroleuses* were believed to be setting fires at the close of the Commune, hands dirtied by these chores could subject a woman or a child to summary execution, or at least arrest and conviction by a military court.<sup>184</sup> Observing women's material lives in September 1870 during the early days of a new Republic reveals the conditions they struggled with then. While government leadership and its requests changed after the siege, women's material considerations did not, as a need for fuel, for example, indicates.

On the surface, the enemy of the *patrie en danger* of September 1870 was not the same one as March 1871. The Prussian threat of September, however, which demanded coalescing a united front across class and gender divides in some ways,

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<sup>184</sup> Addressed later, even quick, although detailed, sketches drawn on the streets of Paris during the final bloody days of the Commune depict children lying dead in the street. See NWU/Siege of Paris/Etchings/pf1, 119.

consistently ran second on a list of terrorist threats for the republic's leadership and military. In the minds of those in charge of keeping order among the members of a new republic, the urban poor in Paris – and the National Guard that would become dominated by them – stood as the ongoing threat to the country. That perception had only increased since 1848 when Adolphe Thiers – eventually to become president of France after the siege in 1870-71 – had stated that the biggest threat to the nation was “the communism of the workers which will, if it is not restrained, make industry and trade impossible and ruin the country from top to bottom.”<sup>185</sup> In terms of the population of Paris, women numerically made up approximately 50 percent of that domestic threat. Consequently, September demanded both sides of a paradox: women must respond as citizens, filling the needs of the attacked state and city, which desperately counted on “the courage and patriotism of *tous*”; they must also be kept from becoming the theoretically impossible – active *citoyennes* – with full public rights of participation in the new Republic. This paradox could not be evenly satisfied, bringing the gendered organization of public and private into clearer view, creating gendered tension mixed with class tensions, early on in the republic.

Chapter I revealed that two years after Imperial restrictions on press and public assembly relaxed, Parisian women reclaimed a varied presence in a new republic. Often, this presence indicated women's prioritization of their gendered positions in both public and private spheres – and that these spheres overlapped in gendered ways. This chapter

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<sup>185</sup> From a 4 March 1848 quote from *Le Monde*, cited in J.P.T. Bury and R.P. Tombs, *Thiers 1797-1877: A Political Life*, 104.

has also highlighted the public and private prominence of women at a moment of significant, overnight change. While not everyone was comfortable with what materialized, women emerged from the wings and men in power – including the police – were watching and listening to them. No one could legitimately and totally remove them as Paris – and the republic – struggled to survive.

This chapter argued that the declaration of the Republic on 4 September elevated women's awareness of, and importance in, political events as they incorporated themselves into a republican, *tous*. Early in September, women spoke in clubs and appeared in the streets. They wrote government officials to gain support for their projects and quickly organized work among themselves. Women like Bréton took in refugees and tended the wounded, considering the material costs of doing so. Women's wartime interests and efforts did not, and could not, simply imitate men's, contributing to their alternate definitions of republican action.<sup>186</sup> Women's labor, means, and influence shaped these early days of crisis as they responded to published government calls, often receiving payment for their services. The emergency setting of the declaration of the republic allowed women from a variety of socio-economic positions a legitimized claim to the public domain – and not only as food providers or under the mantel of Rousseauian “Republican Motherhood.” Despite a lack of suffrage – a hallmark of male republicanism – women not only positioned themselves as crucial to these political and military events, but male government officials, including Trochu and the police,

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<sup>186</sup> Over the next hundred years or so, these formerly “alternate” definitions would become dominant.

responded likewise. The weeks following 4 September initiated a trajectory of experiences and discourse, which escalated during the coming siege.



**FIGURE 1.1, A.P. Martial, “L’Ennemi!”**  
 Northwestern University Charles Deering McCormick  
 Special Collections Library



FIGURE 1.2, A.P. Martial, "Boucherie."  
Northwestern University Charles Deering McCormick  
Special Collections Library





**FIGURE 1.3, Nathalie LeMel**  
Northwestern University Charles Deering McCormick  
Special Collections Library

## II. “WOMEN BUSY FROM MORNING TO NIGHT”: THE SIEGE ERA

On 20 September 1870, the gates of Paris officially closed against the first of two sieges.<sup>1</sup> The Prussian army surrounded the city, with Bismarck at its head. As Victorine Malenfant Rouchy expressed it, “on the twenty-first we were encircled.”<sup>2</sup> Paris was left alone to endure this part of the *année terrible* with little outside aid, military or otherwise. The few remaining government representatives soon sailed away in balloons, crafted primarily by women. The city’s National Guard would be virtually alone in fighting the foreign enemy as the Prussian military established its jurisdiction over the northeast of France. In January 1871 with the siege still underway, Germany declared itself a nation at Versailles. France declared the war over on 28 January. On 1 March 1871 and with permission of a defeated French government, Prussian troops paraded through the streets of Paris as its population shrouded the city in silence and black. Women participated in all arenas of life during this siege and its aftermath, often surviving, but sometimes succumbing, to some of the most horrible days of the city’s history. Women’s public political and military participation increased as conditions intensified over these months, with male municipal and National Defense officials correspondingly demanded their contributions. These first months of the Republic form the chronological context for the arguments presented in Chapter II.

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<sup>1</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/SCPV-22/43 and Le Chevalier, *Les Murailles politiques françaises depuis le 18 juillet 1870 jusqu’au 25 mai 1871, Tome I* (Paris: Le Chevalier, 1874) 92. Trochu posted officially on 23 September 1870 that “le siège est donc commencé.” Some had avenues for contacts with the outside world, at least for a while after this date. Still, these put participants at some risk. Officially however, 20 September was the last day the gates were open for commerce and other transactions. The second siege is another term used to imply the Commune, when French troops surrounded and bombarded the city beginning on 3 April 1871.

<sup>2</sup> Victorine Brocher, *Souvenirs d’une morte vivante* (Paris: François Maspero, 1977[1909]), 105.

This chapter argues that the severe emergency circumstances of the siege piqued women's understanding of their gendered social and political positions, although not all women crossed the lines of traditional bourgeois "respectability" in the process. Four sections addressing ambulance and front-line military service, the significance of food acquisition, siege-era clubs, and women as police suspects reveal the many arenas of women's public and private activities. The numbers of wounded and ill heightened the need for women's medical service, as military and municipal services overlapped. Military *volontaires* included women. Food and fuel shortages became profound, bringing women's association with provisioning to the forefront of personal and municipal concerns. Public clubs all over Paris became the theatres of the siege months, with often unnamed but vocal working women as active participants in many debates. Police looked on.

This organization follows a chronological trajectory through the siege in each of the four sections. Reiterating the siege chronology in this manner reinforces the argument that the boundaries between appropriate and inappropriate female behavior increasingly and repeatedly blurred. These shifting boundaries created a greater range of acceptable activities for women of any class, given the harsh conditions of total war engulfing Paris. Police interrogations and trial records of women relevant to the Commune most often mention their activities during the siege, with substantial numbers suggesting to authorities a direct link between siege and Commune actions.<sup>3</sup> Therefore,

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<sup>3</sup> The interests of military and police authorities are paramount in these files, but reveal their assumptions that a woman's siege activities were indicative of her Commune participation – or visa versa. However, certainly substantial numbers of women in Paris during the Commune would have also occupied the city during the siege. Other Commune sources bearing women's names, such as National Guard payroll or

post-Commune trial records demonstrate authorities' interest in women's siege activities involving public speech, political expression, and association with the military. During the siege, authorities called for women's efforts in the city's defense.

Municipal and national leadership now needed the labor of women of all classes, requesting it in explicit and implicit forms. Although working women held long-term, if "improper," access to public space, the siege brought virtually all women who remained in Paris in direct, continuous contact with public political events. Access to the public sphere became virtually mandatory. During the siege, public experiences now engaged many more women, redefining women's "appropriate" republican behavior, if only for a while. Public participation also increased women's opportunities to observe the redundancy of their gendered place in private and public. As such, observing women's experiences also reveals points of conflict with male authorities as they articulated alternate, not secondary, priorities. The siege, as part of the experience of this new Republic, provided quotidian alterations in class, gender, and sex categories and the relationships between them.

A somewhat "obscure conflict" in the longer context of Modern European history, the Franco-Prussian war – and particularly the four-and-one-half month siege that concluded it – created "a unique moment in the life of the City of Light, a time of about-faces in the quotidian order. . . . a world turned upside down."<sup>4</sup> Gustave de Molinari

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beneficiary lists, also indicate links between women's presence in the records of both siege and Commune. The fact siege-era National Guard records came into the hands of police also suggests the police believed siege participation might give clues as to Commune roles.

<sup>4</sup> Hollis Clayson, *Paris in Despair: Art and Everyday Life under Siege (1870-71)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 4. Clayson's book is the only English-language study produced in decades addressing any aspect of the siege as separate from the explicitly military actions of the Franco-Prussian

wrote in *Clubs Rouges*, “Paris under siege possessed unlimited liberty of the press and public meeting; the government permitted just about anything to be said, and one might add that it allowed just about everything to be done.”<sup>5</sup> On 9 September, the Government of National Defense formally declared it would remain in Paris, but by 12 September, a *délégation* made up of virtually the entire government had left for Tours, then Bordeaux. A few, such as Minister of the Interior, Léon Gambetta, followed in balloons in October. October 31 and 22 January brought momentary declarations of a Commune and the Prussian military bombarded the city between 6 – 26 January 1871. However, military actions outside the city’s walls brought women of those districts and women serving in the National Guard, such as Malenfant Rouchy, into contact with the enemy long before January. During the months of the siege, Parisian women and men who could not or did not want to leave remained behind to defend Paris – and the Republic – from Prussian domination. The national government willingly let this armed, ultimately starving force do so.

### **Ambulance Work: Battlefield, Municipal, Privately-funded<sup>6</sup>**

As yet it is difficult to reconstruct the full scope of women’s involvement in ambulance service, but Malenfant Rouchy’s account, combined with other records,

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war or from the Commune. Other scholars of the siege have neglected women’s experiences, although Clayson integrates them somewhat in her analysis of print media.

<sup>5</sup> M. G. Molinari de, *Les clubs rouges pendant le siège de Paris* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1871), i-ii.

<sup>6</sup> The term, *ambulance*, offers many varieties in terms of specific locations and forms of care, often not duplicating the roles of hospitals, which also tended the wounded and the ill. However, all ambulance personnel tended wounded or ill soldiers, although women’s medical care for the population of Paris more generally also becomes clear in examining their roles in ambulances. I employ the term field hospitals at times, indicating the ambulance battlefield units where surgery and other care was provided to soldiers, theoretically overseen by doctors.

indicates their aid was desperately needed and fully welcomed early in the siege.<sup>7</sup> *Ambulancières* were often, though certainly not only, the wives of National Guards, and all *ambulancières* were eligible to receive the same pay and rations as male National Guard troops. In addition, women's less-official attending to soldiers is indicated by the earlier mention of Mme Delaroche-Vernet's 6 September comment that "if Monsieur Michel was wounded, we have told him to get himself moved here as he doesn't have any women nearby."<sup>8</sup> However, by 6 October, Delaroche-Vernet mentions "Monsieur Tiby whose wife is in the ambulances," indicating that women were already actively serving the field hospitals and other medical facilities by that date.<sup>9</sup> Gendered responsibilities as a mother, daughter, and wife limited – and expanded – the means by which Victorine Malenfant Rouchy and other women could achieve the title and responsibilities of citizen in the Republic now waging war. Initially barred from formal military participation, a virtually-necessity for *citoyens*, *Citoyenne* Malenfant Rouchy felt she must nonetheless serve her *patrie*.

Although gendered military procedure and her own circumstances seemed to disallow her participation as an *ambulancière*, Malenfant Rouchy became determined, personally and publicly, to dispute that rationale in republican terms. She wrote an extended letter to *Le Rappel*, "reclaiming [women's] right [as *citoyennes*], alongside that

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<sup>7</sup> For scholarly research attempting to broaden the scope of understanding about women medical workers in the somewhat-analogous American Civil War context, see Jane E. Schultz, *Women at the Front: Hospital Workers in Civil War America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

<sup>8</sup> André Delaroche-Vernet, *Une famille pendant la guerre et la Commune, 1870-71: Lettres* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1912), 48.

<sup>9</sup> Delaroche-Vernet, *Une famille pendant la guerre*, 67.

of nuns, to attend to [the] wounded on the field of battle.”<sup>10</sup> In response, she received a letter from the local committee associated with the International Red Cross, *Le comité de la rue Feydeau*.<sup>11</sup> They welcomed her and when she told them of her “great desire which [she] had to be useful to [her] *patrie*,” they admitted her to the group.<sup>12</sup> She learned how to stock the medical unit, about necessary cleanliness, and how to assist the doctors, including how to roll and apply bandages and prepare materials, including needles and silk thread, for surgery. After a few weeks she and others were prepared to enter a National Guard unit, either at the ramparts or at the front.<sup>13</sup> In September, military officials initially supported women’s efforts in this arena.

General Trochu, the leader of military forces in Paris and the region, originally agreed to this idea, with respondents to the mayors’ calls for women ambulance volunteers proving plentiful. As women completed training, all had been arranged for them to join units where they were needed. *Ambulancière* service would be in units to which doctors had previously been assigned and most likely need assistance. However, Trochu suddenly changed his mind when the women became available for service towards the end of September. He justified the preference for nuns on the battlefield, claiming that they had a “sacred character and that having taken vows they were

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<sup>10</sup> Brocher, *Souvenirs*, 106. Malenfant Rouchy’s account implies her struggle to gain admittance to the corps began in early September, with a letter to the newspaper sent during that month. However, a 24 October letter by her to *Le Rappel* indicates the resolution analyzed here did not occur until October. Another possibility is that while she found satisfaction in September, her arguments in behalf of women more generally continued through at least October.

<sup>11</sup> The Franco-Prussian War was the first international conflict in which the Red Cross would play a role. As such, people such as Clara Barton, who later established the Red Cross in the U.S., traveled to Europe in 1870 to observe results and volunteer in its service.

<sup>12</sup> Brocher, *Souvenirs*, 106.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 107.

respected by everybody; [in contrast] civil *ambulancières* would be exposed to significant disadvantages” (or objections, *inconvénients*).<sup>14</sup> This was the end of *Le comité de la rue Feydeau*. This significant resistance to non-religious women (meaning women who were not nuns) supplying military aid was not unique to Trochu. However, it demonstrates the obstacles that *citoyennes* had to overcome in demonstrating their value as citizens, even when, prior to the Commune, the Republic still saw Paris as an ally.

An additional implication of Trochu’s statement – and one that women experienced and wrote about – is that the doctors and soldiers would likely treat *citoyennes* in gendered oppressive ways that nuns might not experience – or about which they might not complain.<sup>15</sup> Perhaps nuns might accommodate more dominance from men than those women volunteering for ambulance duty. However, Trochu implied that without the seeming protection of a nun’s habit and vows of chastity, a woman could expect sexual disorder and danger on the battlefield and in a field hospital. Perhaps more significantly, he also suggested that the gendered reputation of the citizen *ambulancière* was already suspicious. *Ambulancières* acted outside the arena of traditionally-acceptable behavior for non-religious women. These volunteers – even if technically, *citoyennes* – were primarily sexualized and subordinate women first, not citizens aiding their country. The nuns’ vows placed them in a category that did not include sexuality or citizenship – both acceptable male domains. Nuns could therefore be articulated as safe:

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Whether this occurred due to financial considerations, the ramifications of female battlefield presence in terms of their potential citizenship, or for other reasons is unclear.

<sup>15</sup> André Léo wrote an article specifically critiquing this point after hearing reports of sexist harassment of citizen efforts during the Commune. “Aventures de neuf ambulancières,” in *La Sociale*, 6 Mai 1871. This event is addressed in Chapter 5.



safe for the men, for “real” women, and for the nation. How women saw this issue and their contributions as citizens did not matter to the men who made the decisions.

However, Malenfant Rouchy did not stop offering her services as a citizen of the Republic just because Trochu or any other male said she must.

Malenfant Rouchy’s experience demonstrates that officers below Trochu at least occasionally made decisions that they saw were in the best interests of their unit, even if their superiors did not agree. Although saddened, even aggravated, by the policy about-face, Malenfant Rouchy got a letter of recommendation from one of the “ladies of the committee” of rue Feydeau, taking it personally to “Le Capitaine du Q...,” whom she knew lived on the same street as her mother – rue de Beaune in the VII arrondissement.<sup>16</sup> After revealing her “ardent desire to help with the humanitarian work, so indispensable” presently, the captain asked for a few days before responding to her request. Submitting her proposal to a “Colonel M. de G...,” he later admitted her into the 7th Company of the 17th Battalion of the National Guard, 7th Sector. Although her mother was “a bit angry,” Malenfant Rouchy accepted.<sup>17</sup> Rebuffing her mother’s and Trochu’s concerns, she noted that she “doesn’t have foolish prejudices” and that “everywhere [she] would go, [she] kn[e]w that [she] would be respected.”<sup>18</sup> She parenthetically adds, “that was true,” that she “was respected.” That was how Victorine Malenfant Rouchy began her work in the National Guard. Her account suggests that Malenfant Rouchy’s determination to render service as a *citoyenne* employed alternate discourse when needed. Her desires

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<sup>16</sup> Brocher, *Souvenirs*, 107.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

rhetorically shifted from wanting to “render service to her country” to “an ardent desire to help with humanitarian work.” While both appear true, even synonymous, to her, “humanitarian work” – in which nuns and middle-class women also engaged – perhaps allowed her to find the rhetorical middle ground between the role of a citizen – not available to a female – and the role of a nun – not available to a non-religious, republican woman. In any event, Malenfant Rouchy succeeded in her quest, against those men who denied her.

Ambulance service provided more for Malenfant Rouchy than a gendered opportunity to succor the afflicted. After describing her official welcome into the 17th Battalion and the 7th Company of the National Guard, she tellingly notes, “This is how I obtained a *poste de combat*.”<sup>19</sup> She did not say she obtained a position as a nurse, as a doctor’s assistant, as a woman attendant, that she would serve at her husband’s side, or even as an *ambulancière*, but in a *poste de combat*. From her vantage point almost forty years after the fact, she immediately follows this statement with a reminder to the reader of her role as a republican *mère de famille*. She does so by stating that although their lives were difficult, she never abandoned her mother nor her children and that their circumstances seemed more favorable than most.<sup>20</sup> She justifies her work outside the home as compatibly in her family’s and the nation’s best interests, especially as her own *mère de famille* could assume childcare responsibilities. The mother seems resigned to, if not pleased with, her daughter’s “choices,” choices that from the vantage point of both,

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 107. Although analyzed more fully in later chapters, the significance of a combat position will increase, at least for some women, as it allowed one legitimately to be requisitioned arms.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 108.

benefited the household. For the time being, however, Malenfant Rouchy had accomplished her goal as a loyal, republican citizen during an international war: to serve her *patrie* where she saw herself most needed, even over the resistance of male republican and military leaders. An embattled homefront quickly demanded her skills

Malenfant Rouchy's reflections on her first call into the fray as an *ambulancière* set the tone for the intensity of the coming months. Her unit answered the *rappel* to clear out debris at the Javel munitions factory explosion in the XV arrondissement. The scene she entered for several hours made her ask, "if [she] had the strength, the courage to continue."<sup>21</sup> The scene included "many deaths . . . the walls had crumbled . . . human arms, legs, brains . . . and flesh" scattered everywhere "on the piles of stones."<sup>22</sup> As a skilled shoe and boot artisan, Malenfant Rouchy admits never having lived among "*les masses*, either as part of a family or as a *travailleuse*;" she had "never set foot in a factory, nor an atelier."<sup>23</sup> She equates the disaster in the wake of the explosion with the disaster of the lives of the poorest of the poor. "[Her] first steps into the tumultuous [side] of life seemed sinister," but she "wanted to be useful, [and so she] must submit to and act in the role given [her]."<sup>24</sup> This day was to be one of many similar in the coming months, not a rare occurrence. Women continued to tend wounded and their families.

Malenfant Rouchy described her ongoing work in her hard-earned position of *ambulancière*, as well as the simultaneous conditions of her family. By December she remarks that "the French army had lost 6,030 men and of those 414 were officers" and

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<sup>21</sup> Brocher, *Souvenirs*, 110-111.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

that “nothing changed the situation in Paris. The wounded were numerous.”<sup>25</sup> According to her, a Prussian report left the impression with General Ducrot that many bodies remained on the territory between Paris and Champigny; he sent a company of (grave) diggers to bury them. At least 685 were quickly buried in a crude grave sprinkled with lime. Malenfant Rouchy saw the wounded and dead virtually each day.<sup>26</sup> On 9 December, Malenfant Rouchy found herself again at the ramparts, having left her family for another extended tour. Continually cold, with snow hampering every effort, she and her “*petite famille*,” as she called her unit, endured more deprivations. *Famille* at home and on the ramparts needed her. She worried about her charges in the field hospital, but also about her 62-year-old mother, her son, and their adopted charge. As she mentioned, “the children and the elderly died by the hundreds each day.”<sup>27</sup> By 22 December, the cold surrounding her unit was so terrible that “they counted at least 900 frozen to death.”<sup>28</sup> This was how 1870 ended for this *ambulancière* who, like many other women, continued her services throughout the revolutionary Commune.<sup>29</sup>

Women’s work in field hospitals, formerly and officially closed to them, drew laudatory attention from male authors. The published account of Paul and Henry de Trailles casts *ambulancières* as cohorts with women of thirteen other *types*, who

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<sup>25</sup> Brocher, *Souvenirs*, 121.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>29</sup> Most, if not all *ambulancières* of the Commune had prior service during the siege, although specific dates and references, such as those Malenfant Rouchy provides, are less common. In all relevant archival records, all women accused of *ambulancière* service during the Commune had seen *ambulancière* service during the siege.

“delivered France from the foreigner.”<sup>30</sup> As the Trailles include no parallel discussion of men’s contributions, this description of women’s power is particularly conspicuous. Noting the “daily acts of *Françaises* and *Français*, of women and children, the elderly and men” contributing to France’s survival, the Trailles also declare their belief that honor should be accorded “this unanimous *cortège* of women of all classes.”<sup>31</sup> They include women who served the cause as *ouvrières*, *sœurs de charité*, *actrices*, *bourgeoises*, *alsaciennes*, *grandes dames*, *épouses*, and *mères*, among others, demonstrating the Trailles’ ability to view all women as active and significant, even central, participants during the siege. While these *types* appear to reflect their own categorization, the Trailles nonetheless included women less associated with bourgeois propriety – including actresses and workers – in their descriptions of those worthy of national honor. Women representing a range of the Trailles’ *types* provided service in municipal ambulances within the walls of Paris.<sup>32</sup>

Scattered references to the scope of women’s involvement in medical care within the city indicate their constant efforts in aiding the wounded since the early days of the siege. Early on, Geneviève Bréton had been helping at the Hôtel Dieu. On one autumn day, her diary entry reveals her direct aid to wounded soldiers, in addition to poor women. She wrote, “We have some wounded men here, two Zouaves and one from the

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<sup>30</sup> Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris (BHVP)/115 250/Paul and Henry de Trailles, *Les Femmes de France pendant la guerre et les deux sièges de Paris*, 2.

<sup>31</sup> BHVP/115 250/Trailles, *Les Femmes de France pendant la guerre*, 2, 3.

<sup>32</sup> When bombardment began in later months, municipal ambulances functioned as virtual field hospitals in some instances. Most of the time, however, municipal ambulances were where soldiers recovered from wounds or severe illness, after being transferred from the front lines.

mobile guard.”<sup>33</sup> Later, Delaroche-Vernet wrote on 20 December that she is working with the wounded, noting the cold and snow that certainly must be hard on the troops; in the passage she makes no mention of the hardships the cold and snow would place on the wounded under her care.<sup>34</sup> Women also provided ambulance supplies.

The accounts of the *Société de Secours aux Blessés des Armées de Terre et de Mer*, produced in October 1870, reflect women’s involvement in the supplying of the much-needed ambulances.<sup>35</sup> Donations in money and kind are categorized on this notice and listings of supplies reveal women’s gendered participation more clearly. All types of ambulances – municipal ambulances in Paris, privately-established ones in Paris and in the provinces, and mobile military ambulance units – required supplies. Items such as shirts, handkerchiefs, linens, bandages, blankets, as well as wine and other “liqueurs” fill the headings of on-hand and needed items.<sup>36</sup> The gendered production of many of these items and outright donations of money by women regularly recur as subjects in archival sources, including newspapers. However, women’s donations of their unpaid time do not appear to be recorded in this announcement or many other records. Consequently, their labor, if not the results of it, became all the more invisible in the official records of this era.

One woman, whose work in the municipal ambulances and elsewhere appears

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<sup>33</sup> Allen, *The Diary of Geneviève Bréton*, 146. Zouave units were noticeable during the siege and the Commune. However, it is not always clear whether Papal Zouave units or Zouave units by this time composed of Europeans or European Algerians are the subjects. By the Franco-Prussian war, Muslim troops from Algeria formed “Turco” units, although they had initially comprised the Zouave units of the French army earlier in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. NWU/Siege of Paris/ Zouaves; Available from <http://www.library.northwestern.edu/spec/siege/docs/PAR00144.html> ; Internet; Accessed 17 July 2005.

<sup>34</sup> Delaroche-Vernet, *Une Famille*, 109-111.

<sup>35</sup> *Murailles, I*, 178-9.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

unpaid, is Juliette Lamber Adam, who described herself as the, “daughter of a doctor, granddaughter of a surgeon.”<sup>37</sup> She elaborates that, “they taught me anatomy, [and] I know how to dress a wound.”<sup>38</sup> Before describing her duties within the ambulance unit she established, she also mentions, “I had also shredded linen [into strips for bandages], made bandages and compresses.”<sup>39</sup> She created a fifty-bed ambulance unit at the Conservatoire de Musique in the IX *arrondissement*, evidently initially funding it herself. By 18 October, she also sponsored her own *fourneau* in the XIII *arrondissement*, which fed 150 children a day, with Lamber Adam often serving.<sup>40</sup> Associated with and adjacent to her ambulance, she created an *atelier de lingerie*, where women made bandages and compresses of all types, along with other items relevant to the running of the ambulance and its surgeons’ needs.<sup>41</sup> Women supplied the ambulances in other ways.

Gendered spaces continued to provide women intersections with the public political and military world, even if they were not at the ramparts receiving National Guard pay like Malenfant Rouchy. With the empire mortally wounded, the Tuileries in the I *arrondissement* became a site for “legal pillage” in behalf of the besieged city and the Republic.<sup>42</sup> Lamber Adam accompanied Mme Lachaud and other women to the Tuileries, searching for anything from coffee to cigars to clothing, with which they might lighten the burdens of the wounded and themselves. The work of wealthier women in Lamber Adam’s atelier, adjacent to the rooms for the wounded, provided supplies for the

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<sup>37</sup> Lamber Adam, *Mes illusions*, 64.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 70, 118.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 70.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 82.

ambulances as well as companionship and distraction for the women themselves. She notes that the atelier populated by better-heeled volunteers was “a great resource for some women,” as they discussed ongoing events openly. As most of their husbands were now away, “[unpaid] work provides a distraction to the misery.”<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, Lamber Adam regularly acknowledges their misery as substantially less than that of poor women. The ambulances also offered women space in which to discuss political events and how their population could participate as they aided their *patrie en danger*.

Women’s ambulances served as a context for private conversations about more public citizen military service and as settings for exemplary organization of citizens. In whispered talks with the women attending them, “many soldiers, wounded in the back, accused their leaders of hiding,” according to Lamber Adam.<sup>44</sup> The male-led Ambulance Commission believed Lamber Adam’s ambulance so well-organized, they asked her immediately to oversee the establishment of more municipal units.<sup>45</sup> Later, Lamber Adam’s husband was named to serve on this commission, likely due to her reputation and skill.<sup>46</sup> Women leading various municipal ambulances also had contact with each other, highlighting the level to which society depended on them. Letters from these same women to male leadership also demanded material help in doing the grunt work of aiding *la patrie*. In one, a woman overseeing an ambulance and its related atelier complains that “200 women . . . are busy from morning to night, [and] can only get to 3,000 kilos of linen a day,” not

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 84-5.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 84.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. Although she never says and I have found no clearly-corroborating sources yet, Monsieur Adam’s association with his wife and her medical family very likely contributed to this appointment.



the 60,000 the leadership sent in a week.<sup>47</sup> Lamber Adam concludes this passage with, “men find great authority in conceit; women find it by looking beyond that.”<sup>48</sup> These women understood how to establish and manage demanding enterprises such as those attempting to meet the desperate need for bandages and bed linens in ambulances. They also evince their ability to deal directly with the men “at the top” who could either make their work more productive or burden them with impossible demands.

By December 1870, a reiterated call to the “Population of Paris” asked for additional unpaid help in finding beds for the wounded, a situation that consistently, if only implicitly, demanded women’s participation. Jules Ferry, though not calling specifically on “*citoyennes*,” asserted “the necessity for all homes to be opened, all families to find a bed to offer those who gave their blood.”<sup>49</sup> In this case, “*Citoyens*,” were to report the number of beds that they could put at the disposal of the convalescing or lightly wounded. Although the terms, *population*, *familles*, and *citoyens* somewhat invisibly included women in this case, the significance runs deeper. Many men were home irregularly, if at all, staying at the ramparts, barricades, or with their units outside the city. Women appear to have provided the bulk of care for the ill and wounded in the hospitals, ambulances, and homes across Paris, as they often did in the best of times. Consequently, this call directly affected women and potentially increased their quotidian burdens, both in requiring them to contact municipal authorities and in their residential

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 80. Here, *confiance* could also be translated as confidence or similarly, but the overall tone of Lamber Adam in these passages implies my translation of “conceit” better infers the limited scope with which she viewed men’s collective analysis during these times. I realize her statement is essentialized, but prefer to let it speak for itself.

<sup>49</sup> NWU/ Siege of Paris/(GND-36) 122.

labors caring for the wounded. In practice then, Ferry's call to the "population of Paris" included all women, as Geneviève Bréton already understood as she housed five wounded soldiers. Some women, however, also occupied the ramparts.

Victorine Malenfant Rouchy continued to serve at the ramparts during the terrible winter of 1870-71, serving at the front lines outside Paris despite pain, inconvenience, and worries about those at her home. She suffered an ongoing toothache, no heat, constant cannon fire, and fatigue along with other deprivations of war on the battlefield.<sup>50</sup> Large numbers of deaths inundated her between the end of November and the first week of December. She found military generals' claims of "glorious combat," absurd.<sup>51</sup> As Malenfant Rouchy commented, even the Prussians were leaving over 10,000 bodies scattered on the frozen ground, adding that none of this changed the situation in Paris nor did body-counts include the wounded.<sup>52</sup> Her mother suffered from malnutrition and the cold at home. In Paris, the children and the elderly died by the hundreds each day. Malenfant Rouchy had received no news about her husband since he had left for service. On Christmas morning, she discussed only the effects of the freezing temperatures.<sup>53</sup> Women did not merely visit the front lines; they served there – while, like many soldiers, thinking of home.

At home in Paris, Malenfant Rouchy echoes the numerous *affiches* that called on women to encourage – even demand – the men in their lives to fulfill their service obligations. An 18 January poster addressed "*Aux habitants de Paris*" and signed by the

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<sup>50</sup> Brocher, *Souvenirs*, 117-121.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 122-3.

Jules Favre and Jules Ferry, reminded (male) residents that “the enemy is killing our wives and children; it bombards us day and night; it covers our hospitals with bombs. . . . suffer and die, if it’s necessary, but win. Vive la République!”<sup>54</sup> Not only were women, children, and women-occupied medical facilities targets of Prussian bombardment, but also, government leaders used those realities as means to energize men to do their military – and masculine – duty. Malenfant Rouchy noted that during military enrollments, large crowds gathered with “men going to enlist, accompanied by their wives and their children,” adding that, “the women were filled with courage and encouraged their husbands to take up arms in defense of *la patrie*.”<sup>55</sup> Given the level of persuasion required from government, women, and children, doing their masculine duty was evidently not a given for the male population. Men went to the front lines more often than women, but women persuaded them that the cause, and taking up arms for it, was just. Other women participated in armed combat.

### **Front-line and Supply-line Women**

Although many appeals came directly to men to enroll voluntarily in National Guard Battalions, some calls were specifically aimed at *citoyennes*. In one case, under the subtitle of, “*La Patrie est en Danger!*” a special call to “*citoyennes*” said, “you are our mothers, our wives and our sisters . . . devoted, heroic, [capable of] . . . yourselves going into combat in the name of France and the Republic.”<sup>56</sup> The authors may not have believed that being “capable” of combat would mean engaging in it. Whether from this

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<sup>54</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/(GND-43) 160; *Murailles*, I, 771.

<sup>55</sup> Brocher, *Souvenirs*, 116.

<sup>56</sup> *Murailles*, I, 277.

announcement or not, some *citoyennes* nonetheless took the call literally, participating in the National Guard as *cantinières*, suppliers of food, drink, and other goods. That siege-era activity, which police later associated with the “immorality” of her *concubinage* status, rather than patriotic defense of a nation, brought Ursule Delcambre, *Veuve* Palmyre to the attention of police after the Commune.<sup>57</sup> They noted she had been a *cantinière* with the *Volontaires de Montrouge*, fighting alongside men during the first siege. Police officials did not describe her siege-era *cantinière* work as inappropriate until they linked it to identical work during the Commune. Delcambre Palmyre denied her continued participation in the Guard after the siege, although police and military authorities did not believe her. Both the defendant and authorities therefore understood that *cantinière* service during the siege was not an improper role, even if it implied battlefield experience. Suggesting that women could, indeed, defend the nation – in combat if necessary – encouraged siege-era deviations from gender norms in practice. Women did not have to go out of their way, be especially radical, or wait long to notice direct calls for their military service.

Félix Belly authored a call for a “*1<sup>er</sup> Bataillon des Amazones de la Seine*” on 10 October 1870, with many respondents.<sup>58</sup> Within a week, cartoonist, Faustin, drew an unflattering caricature of the women likely to respond, indicating Belly’s posting is one of the most well-known requests for women’s military help.<sup>59</sup> This suggests that the call

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<sup>57</sup> Archives Nationale (AN)/BB24/751, Demande en Grâce for Delcambre (Veuve, née Palmire Thierry), Rapport of 18 Juillet 1872. Versions of her name vary within the documents.

<sup>58</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/Posters/pf3/(VC/AA 16); *Murailles*, I, 167.

<sup>59</sup> NWU/CDM, Faustin. A uniformed Belly stands in front of a row of seven nude women of varying shapes and sizes – none flattering – with a uniformed young woman with earrings and heeled boots, blowing the *rappel*. Although Belly had taken the time to describe his fairly practical and preferred attire

and women's immediate response, coupled with the fact women actually did participate on the battlefield, is more important than the ridicule with which the suggestion met, or the nullification of the "*Amazones de la Seine*" as a recognized body. Additionally, about three weeks into the Commune, André Léo wrote in a front page article in *La Sociale*, "*Toutes avec Tous*" that during the siege, "the women, naturally, participated just like the men," and that during those months she had received "letters from [women], expressing their ardent desire to fight, armed, for the defense of their city and *leur patrie*." She added that someone had stopped the enrollments of women in the National Guard during the siege and that many newspaper editors had been sarcastic in their reporting of Belly's suggestion.<sup>60</sup> The leadership of the Government of National Defense (again) ceased officially enlisting women in military units, but as with Malenfant Rouchy, women pushed for – often finding – entrance into the ranks. For Léo, as well as those women who attempted to enroll, women's military service was not a laughing matter.

Belly implied that his call responded to the needs and requests of women themselves, whether or not he had actually heard them. In the first paragraph of the call, Belly announced the opening of an office to enroll women as a response to "numerous letters, and due to the generous natures of a great part of the *population féminine* of Paris."<sup>61</sup> This point also parallels Léo's later argument that women pressed for inclusion.

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for his troops, Faustin made sure to include a feminized and sexualized version as part of the young bugler's image. Always hidden behind pseudonym, Faustin's identity and personal viewpoints are difficult to ascertain. Ouriel Reshef notes he does not appear to have been a consistent republican, but bases that on the newspapers in which some of his work appeared, which may be deceiving. Reshef, *Guerre, Mythes et Caricature: Au berceau d'une mentalité française* (Paris: Presses de la Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1984), 140.

<sup>60</sup> *La Sociale*, 12 April 1871.

<sup>61</sup> *Murailles*, I, 167.

He called for ten battalions of armed women – 1,200 in each – “without distinctions of social classes” who would proudly serve under the title of “*Amazones de la Seine*.”<sup>62</sup> Each battalion would be composed of eight companies of 150 Amazones each. Belly suggested that their primary purpose would be to guard the ramparts and the barricades, something for which identical service during the Commune would result in women’s imprisonment or deportation. The enlistees would be properly trained in military activities. Belly addressed the issue of women’s moral purity in this endeavor by mentioning that all their service would be “compatible with moral order and military discipline.”<sup>63</sup> They would be armed and receive the same pay as all National Guards (as *cantinières* and *ambulancières* already did). For the “*dames des classes riches*,” unlikely to enroll, Belly suggested they donate funds in support of this Battalion.<sup>64</sup> He encouraged their aid by mentioning the threat the Prussians presented against their jewels and other riches, should Paris succumb to the enemy.

Belly continued, demonstrating that his project had a “scientific” aspect to it, noting that a “*médecin expérimenté, autant que possible du sexe féminin*” would be assigned to each battalion.<sup>65</sup> He also associated women’s on-going involvement in ambulances with this new endeavor, suggesting that women also oversee the Amazones’ health and care. He closed by stating that women, “feel that *la patrie* and civilization need all [women’s] strength in order to resist the savage violence of the Prussians.”<sup>66</sup> Additionally, if marshaled, this strength would aid France’s position in the world as,

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

“Europe will look on with admiration at the . . . thousands of women who defend Paris, [pitting] the liberty of the world against a new type of barbarian.”<sup>67</sup> Although Belly’s call was officially nullified as a component of the National Guard or other military unit, women immediately answered the call and by 20 October, an article appeared in *Le Rappel* about its possibilities for success.

Under the regular section titled, “*Zigzags dans Paris*,” Ernest Blum wrote on 20 October in response to Belly’s call, “we are near triumph over the Prussians, because *the women are with us*. (Emphasis in original.)”<sup>68</sup> He astutely added that perhaps “one should not take these words literally: women are not always with men on the large issues” and when that is true, Blum claims it increases the odds of failure by 80 percent, although offers no substantiation of that figure.<sup>69</sup> He adds that the present endeavor will fail if women are not part of it, although Blum argues that presently, “the women are part of [this endeavor]. They are [devoted] with all of our spirits, and they are coming to prove it in the most heroic fashion.”<sup>70</sup> Blum, Belly, and others clearly sought, and believed in, women’s support and participation in all aspects of the total war before them, not ruling out military service. They articulated women’s support as not only desirable but necessary. Their rhetoric was designed to convince men, as much as women. Others also described women’s military participation.

The Traillès brothers described *Volontaires* as full-fledged, armed military

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> *Le Rappel*, 20 October 1870.

<sup>69</sup> It is not clear whether Blum therefore sees women as sometimes being on the “wrong” side of an issue, or that women are generally “right” and men do not take their views into accounts or some other combination.

<sup>70</sup> *Le Rappel*, 20 October 1870.

combatants. Though Ursule Delcambre Palmyre came under post-Commune condemnation for her role as a *volontaire*, reverence seems to have attended women like her during the siege.<sup>71</sup> As with the other drawings accompanying the Trailles' descriptions, those of *volontaires* are more representative than individualized, although not especially exaggerated or dramatized. However, the accompanying text indicates the authors' attempts to support their overall argument about the significance of women's wartime participation with individual examples, even if those examples might not now hold up to historical scrutiny.<sup>72</sup> In these pages, a woman military "volunteer" – as though she could be otherwise – is described as "an officer in the regular army" and rendered with sword drawn, *kepi* in hand, revealing her short, masculine haircut and a clearly-female body.<sup>73</sup> Another image captures *La Volontaire* "*dans les francs-tireurs*," a group that often served as guerrilla sharp shooters. The depiction shows her in official *franc-tireur* uniform in a mountainous setting.<sup>74</sup> The women do not appear hyper-sexualized as in Faustin's cartoon, for example. The authors clearly wanted their audience to understand that these women are "good" *women*, forgiving them their masculine endeavors, as the dire circumstances demanded. Thus far, a survey reveals that fewer drawings and photographs exist for the siege than the Commune, in which individual women occupy military settings. They multiplied during the Commune, simultaneous with the national government's disapproval of female military involvement. However, siege-era written and visual discourse accepted, even glorified, women in combat

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<sup>71</sup> AN/BB24/751, Demande en Grâce for Delcambre (Veuve, née Palmire Thierry), Rapport of 18 Juillet 1872.

<sup>72</sup> BHVP/115 250/Trailles, *Les Femmes de France pendant la guerre*, 193-208.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.



settings. Prussian artillery combat first killed those outside Paris walls, sending some women to see the conditions for themselves.

Before the bombardment of Paris proper, the villages surrounding the forts outside its walls received the brunt of Prussian destruction, killing women and children, as well as inflicting heavy casualties then brought to ambulances.<sup>75</sup> On at least two occasions, Juliette Lamber Adam visited surrounding areas, accompanied by other women, as well as male officials and military escorts. On 29 October, she, her husband, Monsieur Adam, as well as Jules Ferry and Eugène Pelletan went to the fort at Ivry, outside the southeast sector of the city walls. Lamber Adam described the “noise and destruction of the cannon [as] terrible, even sinister.”<sup>76</sup> The scene evoked rivals those depicting the landscape of eastern France during World War I and leads to a follow-up comment reminiscent of the first years of that war, about the ineptitude of the French military generals.<sup>77</sup> Later, on 21 November, she and Madames Dorian and Ménard, went to the fort at Romainville, northeast of city walls, where she describes the skeletal horses attempting to pull the remaining cannon.<sup>78</sup> Women observed both the frontlines and the home front, though their endeavors – and their commentary – often remained historically unnoticed. Women participated in constructing the nexus of home front and battlefield: Parisian barricades.

The unpaid, and historically under-analyzed, labor of women during these months

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<sup>75</sup> For the development of the military defense of Paris in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, see Robert Tombs’ collective work, including, “The Wars Against Paris,” 541. For purposes outlined here, the ramparts of the city had only been built in 1840-1841 when, according to Tombs and others, the Mehemet Ali crises made a European war seem imminent. Paris was prepared for a modern battle at its city walls.

<sup>76</sup> Lamber Adam, *Mes illusions*, 144.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 231-232.

took many forms, sometimes associating them with barricade construction. Just prior to the bombardment of Paris, an “appeal to the patriotism of *tous*” went out from the Commission of Barricades.<sup>79</sup> Commissioners called for labor from “each household” to prepare two sandbags, of specific dimensions, to be “used along with the *pavés* to cover Paris with barricades or to repair their breaches.”<sup>80</sup> The materials for the bags were to come from the households, not from municipal or military funds. In lieu of materials, a household could donate 65 centimes in behalf of those “*citoyens*” who did not or could not make the bags themselves. The call does not specifically go out to “*citoyennes*” or “women.” However, households included the women who were most likely to procure the materials and do the sewing necessary for the project, whether households produced the bags or donated the centimes. These same barricades – and others later constructed – will harbor the living and dead bodies of women defenders during the last week of May. For the time being in the winter of 1870-71, women’s association with the barricades’ construction was acceptable, even required, mirroring Belly’s earlier call for armed women to defend them. During the fall and winter of 1870-1871, women received citizen calls to duty, and many reported for it.

*Affiches* and A.P. Martial’s drawings indicate women’s involvement in the solicitation of funds for cannon, revealing women’s centrality within the patriotic production of even the most virile symbols of war.<sup>81</sup> While Martial’s images depict women’s solicitations at fundraisers, city-wide posters regularly sought donations to

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<sup>79</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/“Affiches officielles et diverses publiées pendant le siège,” (1352-XI), misc5, dated 1 January 1871; *Murailles*, I, 683.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/Etchings/pf6: AP Martial, “Les femmes de Paris pendant le siège,” 7.

make cannon, which were “necessary in fighting with some advantage against the Prussian artillery.”<sup>82</sup> As the Prussian military had captured many French cannon – 800 by another posted account – the need was all the more immediate.<sup>83</sup> One *annonce* situated itself as an “*Appel à Tous*,” emphatically requesting donations “for the cannon, please!!!”<sup>84</sup> Yet again, women asserted themselves as part of the universal, *tous*, as they donated money in response. Contributing her own two francs to the cannon, Victorine Malenfant Rouchy later noted that, “everyone collaborated, the poorest just as much as the richest.”<sup>85</sup> When in March 1871, troops representing the National Government attempted to retrieve these cannon, paid for by these same Parisian subscriptions, women were the first to resist. However, the siege presently made the association with cannon production a patriotic act.

Concluding his work on women’s involvement during the siege, Martial handwrote an *hommage* to the “patriotic union of women” whom his drawings depicted. He stated that, “whether fighting or defending, Parisian women did it all.” He then lists various areas in which women revealed “inspiring” patriotic loyalty, including military drills, work at the ramparts, their attire, and by provisioning troops.<sup>86</sup> Although representational, Martial’s drawings are not caricatures and they indicate that men could perceive women as significant, even mandatory, contributors to a nation, especially a nation under siege. As long as Paris and its inhabitants remained formally associated with the national, republican government, men could view military women as patriotic

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<sup>82</sup> *Murailles, I*, 162-3.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 239.

<sup>85</sup> Brocher, *Souvenirs*, 115.

<sup>86</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/Etchings/pf6: AP Martial, “Les Femmes de Paris pendant le Siege,” 13.

citizens, acting appropriately, if temporarily, on the political and military stage of the siege. Simultaneously, more women entered military-associated arenas and answered direct or implied calls for their citizen service, especially as food became the dominant preoccupation of most.

### **Food, Food, Food**

When on leave from her *ambulancière* duties, Malenfant Rouchy would return home to food crises. After the munitions explosion early in her September work, she was thrilled to return to her family, hugging and kissing her young child; “for a moment, [she] was happy.”<sup>87</sup> This day of contrasted horrors and happiness leads her narration to describe the toll that the lack of milk – and therefore her choice to cease breastfeeding – will soon take on her young son, the only bright light in her otherwise hellish day. At the end of September, she could still find drinkable milk for her child, but soon, “it wasn’t milk they sold us, it was a horrible mixture composed of the brains of . . . , I dare not say it; of calves said some; but there were no calves [by that time in the siege] . . . later still, they sold a combination of starch and something else, I don’t know what.” “The other child, being older, drank what we drank. From this day on, I no longer wanted to buy [what passed for] milk. But what could I do?”<sup>88</sup> This refrain repeats and grounds her descriptions of increasing prices and black market food that is not actually food at all, but a concoction not fit for human consumption.<sup>89</sup> In many ways, this brief narrative summarizes the particular challenges and conflicts facing many women during the siege:

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<sup>87</sup> Brocher, *Souvenirs*, 111.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 111-112.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 112-114.

simultaneous service to their *patrie* and families, the quotidian realities of total war.

Daily life under siege conditions merged women further into the public sphere.

Women's association with *la famille*, *l'humanité*, as well as secular instruction for children and provisioning food, directly linked them at this juncture with defense of *la patrie*. Dated 3 October 1870, an announcement signed by a few *citoyens*, passed a "Jugement" against the Germans, noting their threats against "*La Famille, la Patrie, l'Humanité*."<sup>90</sup> The threat implied one against women, at least as part of *la famille* and *l'humanité*. Soon after, the mayor of the XIV arrondissement, Élie Ducoudray, announced on 9 October the immediate need for schools to be transformed into ambulances, and that more free and secular schools would soon open for boys and girls with free meals for the children.<sup>91</sup> He included the general overview of the rationing program on the same poster. These signs posted around Paris or the relevant arrondissements created public knowledge about the calls for service. Posters duplicated by the dozens or hundreds covered the city.<sup>92</sup> Even without formal addresses to *citoyennes* or *les femmes de Paris*, public requests for help included women as part of their audience and implied their help in attaining desired goals. Feeding and teaching young children, standing in ration lines, and increasing the numbers of ambulances required women's labor and time. Women of all classes did not have to spend much time in the public sphere in order to receive the messages that their help was necessary to the

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<sup>90</sup> *Murailles*, I, 146-7.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>92</sup> During the Commune, the municipal printing office alone consumed 5,000 reams of *papier d'affiches*, although the number of affiches produced during the siege – a longer timeframe – was great. Passers-by were inundated with these images and information during both the siege and Commune. Margaret Lesser, ed., *Clarkey: A Portrait in Letters of Mary Clarke Mohl (1793-1883)* (Oxford, 1984), 195.

nation and city in this time of total war. Along with the Malenfant women, the rest of Paris faced daily-escalating costs and shortages of the most basic necessities.

Lack of sustenance encouraged many residents to question basic religious and social beliefs. Conditions were so bad by late November they left Joseph-André Vignix to comment about God, “If he existed, he must [now] be dead,” indicating material realities most affected his analysis.<sup>93</sup> Geneviève Bréton, in addition to tending the sick and wounded, mentioned that by 30 December,

There’s much fear here of the reds, as they’re called, revolutionaries. And as for me, I say that the poor wretches must have a share of virtue and patriotism, despite the bad conditions in which they live, the deficiencies of their education, and their innate perversity. I admire them for not turning to devour us, the so-called fortunate of the world, the rich in short.<sup>94</sup>

She added “I had to refuse bread to 50 people . . . I didn’t have any more. It had all been given away. I wept for them. Merciful God! Why such injustice!”<sup>95</sup> God seemed silent to both Vignix and Bréton. Although always sympathetically charitable, Bréton’s sensitivity to the suffering of *les masses* appears to have increased with worsening conditions among the “so-called fortunate.” She understood that starvation, cold, and bombardment strained everyone’s resources, offering an analysis of universal injustice that linked present harsh times with further revolutionary possibilities. With a Commune expressed – and suppressed – on 31 October and with 22 January’s brief declaration still in the offing, the mood was decisively threatening. Bréton sensed the reasons for, and

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<sup>93</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/ms, Vignix, Joseph-André, 1869-1871, 41. Given the phrase, it is interesting to note that Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) served with Prussia in the Franco-Prussian War as a medical orderly in ambulance service, although he had previously renounced his Prussian citizenship. He suffered from dysentery and diphtheria during the war and his wartime observations contributed substantially to his philosophical perspective.

<sup>94</sup> Allen, *The Diary of Geneviève Bréton*, 160.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

fearful potential of, rising tensions among those most affected by present conditions – while simultaneously describing the poor as innately perverse. Though understanding them, Bréton did not desire revolutionary repercussions. On an individual level, her humanitarian aid staved off starvation – and revolution – a bit longer. If they survived the siege, poor women did not forget the effects of these conditions. During the siege, the quest for food put some at particular risk, though sometimes with material benefits.

Wartime gleaners contributed to the provisioning of besieged Paris. Revolting to Lamber Adam was the Prussian shelling of *maradeurs*, often women and children who attempted to salvage any fruits, vegetables, or other edibles from the open fields, abandoned during the fighting outside city walls. Increasing meager food stocks in Paris, gleaners also altered the economy with the prices they charged – assuming they survived. As of 20 November, the most recent attack on these civilians had wounded or killed 175 women and children.<sup>96</sup> Victorine Malenfant Rouchy commented on these people in her memoir, noting their role in escalating food prices. Spending a large portion of her day searching for food that will not leave her children sick, if not exactly make them healthy, she writes about searching for carrots for her young charge, now suffering from an attack of jaundice. She had been advised to feed the toddler carrots and juice. Her mother searched for some at les Halles, only finding a few carrots for a very high price. These foods were the jurisdiction of the *maradeurs*, who, if they had anything, could charge what they pleased.<sup>97</sup> *Maraudeurs* took substantial risks in obtaining the few fresh items the city received during these months. This is evident in a response that Mme Malenfant,

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<sup>96</sup> Lamber Adam, *Mes illusionss*, 230.

<sup>97</sup> Brocher, *Souvenirs*, 112.

Victorine's mother, hears when complaining to them: "Do you think we're going to break [our necks] for nothing?"<sup>98</sup> She returned home with three carrots. Both *maraudeurs* and their price-gouged buyers – virtually always women on both counts – had their points in the besieged city. While women's association with food provisioning is traditional, during the siege, it formed perhaps the most important component of municipal, and therefore, national, survival. At least one woman had the ear of a government official and hoped to influence understanding of the gendered nature of food acquisition.

Lamber Adam did not suffer to the extent of most, but she empathized with women she saw, offering a specifically gendered analysis of circumstances. A regular visitor to the Lamber Adam household and member of the *Commission des Subsistances*, Monsieur Cernuschi, received an earful from Lamber Adam during a discussion on the needs of Parisians during the siege. She implored,

Take pity on the poor women who line up in the rain, the cold, spending one-half a day in order to get a meager bit of meat. This daily ritual is difficult enough, but especially so for the women, who are the most burdened by the privations imposed on them. Men don't understand their sufferings, the illnesses of the women who live 3-4 hours of each day standing with their feet in water, exposed [to the elements].<sup>99</sup>

This was on 24 October, barely one month into the four-and-one-half month siege, and before the oncoming winter and further deprivations. However, her assertion reveals a woman's lens on the quotidian realities of women's lives – and men's seeming ignorance of them – during this war targeting civilians, not just military personnel. In her comments to Cernuschi, she emphasizes the layering of gendered hardships, easily

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid. In the original, the phrase is "casser la ...," not revealing the specific word, likely implying a stronger noun Malenfant Rouchy later chooses not to employ in a published account. However, this translation gives the feel and intent of the question.

<sup>99</sup> Lamber Adam, *Mes illusions*, 131.



observed in public, in which provisioning food also meant increased risk of illness. Here, the combination of sex category, gendered labor, and poverty augmented the possibility of death. Rhetoric demanding women's protection did not gain it in practice. As with Bréton, her own privilege was clear to Lamber Adam, but it did not accommodate a denial of the privations of those who shared her category of sex, if not her class. While class status affected whether or not one starved, it was not that simple.

More affluent households had the space and funds to provision for extended periods of time, even if something as dramatic as a siege was not anticipated; the poor did not. The poor often lived day-to-day, even meal-to-meal; among the poorest, those meant the same. Having neither the funds nor the room for long-term storage exponentially increased a household's risks during the siege. While stores of food aided wealthier residents, all residents were subject to rationing. Determined by household size, rationing served to feed household domestic staffs as well as owners. I have found no cases of women turning out domestics during the siege, though that possibility certainly exists.<sup>100</sup> As with Pressensé and Malenfant Rouchy, many households increased their number of residents during the siege, answering calls to take in refugees, wounded, and the otherwise homeless. Whatever the circumstances, someone within each household had to stand in line for rations, dicker with *maraudeurs*, or scrounge for edibles in other, less visible ways; that someone appears to have been most often, a woman. This point is reflected in Lamber Adam's attempt to influence male leadership assigned to oversee food distribution in the city. It also positions gender considerations at the center of the

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<sup>100</sup> Some households let staff go as they fled Paris prior to 20 September or when fleeing events of the Commune after 18 March 1871, however.

problems facing Paris. Food – the traditional purview of women – was the key player in all municipal efforts.

Many viewed capitulation as inevitable without incoming foodstuffs.<sup>101</sup> Initially, food was given free to the most needy and at a fixed price to everyone else. Attempting to avoid price gouging and famine, the step seemed reasonable. However, Malenfant Rouchy, Lamber Adam, and Vignix have indicated that exorbitant prices and hunger were already widespread by October. Municipal cantines, set up in various neighborhoods in each arrondissement, offered help as early as 10 October, though these efforts and the accompanying rationing would not ultimately feed Paris for the months required, leaving thousands dead.<sup>102</sup> As revealed in Martial's drawings and street-corner *affiches*, in-kind donations were needed, even before the "*Boucherie Canine et Féline*" began.<sup>103</sup> Although evidently Goncourt and a few other *riches* of Paris were still eating well by November, most were not and circumstances soon worsened. Discussions as to whether an unprovisioned Paris could really hold out for another two months, as some suggested it could, intersperse Lamber Adam's diary entries of November 1870.<sup>104</sup> Women formed the bulk of those searching and queuing for food and fuel throughout the fall and winter. Many of the poorest contributed to the resistance against prophesied capitulation.

One incident in a soup kitchen in late October highlights a moment of contact, even unity, between women of the poor and wealthy classes. A conversation took place

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<sup>101</sup> Lamber Adam, *Mes illusions*, 217-218.

<sup>102</sup> *Murailles, I*, 181. Rationing announcements exist for all arrondissements in the NWU Siege of Paris collection.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

<sup>104</sup> Lamber Adam, *Mes illusions*, 218.

between Mme Lamber Adam and an unidentified woman.<sup>105</sup> Rumors of an armistice between France and Prussia rattled many among both the poor and rich still in Paris. Situating herself as a representative of *le peuple*, a poor mother of one of the children eating at the soup kitchen told Lamber Adam in agreement, “Madame, *le peuple* do not want this amnesty.” Lamber Adam gently corrects her, saying, “you mean, armistice,” to which the woman responds, “No Madame, it is more like an amnesty; I have read plenty, I well understand the word. It means that during a period of time, they will not kill Prussians. They are cowards if they sign that!”<sup>106</sup> Choosing to include this moment in her account of that day demonstrates its significance to Lamber Adam’s experience. It also exposes the fact that a poor woman had a clear understanding of the situation, although an understanding that initially made her look mistaken, perhaps illiterate, to one more educated.<sup>107</sup> Appearances can be deceiving and a poor woman’s analysis – generally unnoticed by elites, as Lamber Adam earlier suggested – remained a threat to national leaders. Though not speaking of women in particular, Bréton’s analysis also hinted that the poor remained a more substantial threat to the government than the Prussians. The women’s conversation in the *fourneau* also reveals one way they aligned across socio-economic class divides as they articulated their political perspectives.

Women’s activities relevant to food provisioning for the poor could also eventually have political, even criminal consequences. While questioning Nathalie Duval Lemel on 21 June 1871, the police asked about her ongoing association with *La Marmite*,

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<sup>105</sup> While it appears this incident took place in the *fourneau* Lamber Adam had established in the XIII, the location is not immediately clear.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>107</sup> If in fact the woman was dishonest about her reading literacy – perhaps her sources of understanding were more oral than written – she still indicates a political understanding of events.

her organization that supplied meals and food to the poor long before the war or siege. Commissioner Pédezers questioned her about founding *La Marmite* with a male member of the Commune government and Internationalist, Eugène Varlin. She answered, “The society offered workers the necessities of life at a low price. It began three years ago [1868]. The meetings took place in the amphitheatre of the *École de Médecine*. It was not political.”<sup>108</sup> Duval Lemel clearly disassociated her work from politics. She does so, not only to disavow its connection to her later involvement in the Commune, but because she could argue that providing for the needs of the poor was women’s role and by definition, not political. Monsieur Cernuschi of the *Commission des Subsistances* was political; Duval Lemel was doing “women’s work.” An alternate consideration is that during the war, this “women’s role” became a patriotic one for women or men – Duval Lemel or Cernuschi. However, the police questioning this “political detainee” in the wake of the Commune linked her involvement in *La Marmite* and the Commune to her separation from her husband, not to patriotic duty. This perspective, among other things, resulted in her ultimate sentence of deportation to a walled fortification. Food, and women’s provisioning of it, could be quite political.

Women formed a potential audience for government leaders attempting to find caches of food and recalcitrant draftees. On 17 January 1871, the Minister of Agriculture and Commerce called on the ungendered “*toute personne*” who might find hidden stores of wheat or rye, to have those discoveries verified by the proper authorities. Once

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<sup>108</sup> AHG/Ly23/4e Conseil de Guerre/688, dossier Duval Lemel, 21 June 1871 Procès Verbal. This also corresponds to well-documented information about *La Marmite*.

verified, the vigilant patriot would receive 25 francs worth of grain.<sup>109</sup> Shopkeepers and those of the more affluent ranks had formed earlier targets of suspicion for obvious reasons, with several anecdotes of treasonous hoarding printed in newspapers by December. *Affiches* also indicate the regularity with which neighborly suspicion might be rewarded, should hidden stores be found. The use of this tactic increased in January, as desperation escalated. Citizens had also been called on to find and encourage those men who had not officially enrolled in the National Guard – or those hiding out.<sup>110</sup> Whether as individuals, as part of illegal but tolerated vigilance committees, or in less-formal groups, women forcefully “persuaded” men to see their patriotic duty. Louise Michel indicated that women sometimes employed armed persuasion.<sup>111</sup> By the end of January, patriotism would not save Paris or France from surrender.

On 26 January 1871, with the armistice two days away, the National Guard and population of Paris still refused to capitulate, although the matter would soon be taken out of their hands; women were as adamant as any. Lamber Adam noted that her husband was in a hospital, wounded, and that she was quite sick, due to the terribly cold weather (and other circumstances) that were part of the winter of 1870-71. Even with “no food, no fuel, and no money,” most concurred with her that there should be “no capitulation! Never!”<sup>112</sup> She reported that although there had been no bread distributed in Belleville – one of the poorest sectors – for three days, its residents did not want to

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<sup>109</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/(SCPV-85), 159; *Murailles*, I, 766.

<sup>110</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/Affiches officielles et diverses publiées pendant le siège, 1352-XI (11-misc), misc12.

<sup>111</sup> Michel, *Mémoires* (Arles: Éditions Sulliver, 1998), 152.

<sup>112</sup> Lamber Adam, *Mes illusions*, 330.

surrender.<sup>113</sup> Malenfant Rouchy's report coincides with Lamber Adam's when she said that women shouted, "Even if they continue to reduce our rations, [that won't matter], we will sooner die than capitulate." However, "generals and lawyers" had decided the fate of France, according to Malenfant Rouchy. As of 28 January, according to this woman, "*c'est fini!*"<sup>114</sup>

### Siege-era Clubs

Throughout the siege, women formed clubs and committees, in which they articulated and often put into practice, their visions for addressing their problems. As part of freedom of assembly established with the republic, republican clubs convened all over Paris. For supporters and detractors alike, they were "replacing theatres" as social venues by early October.<sup>115</sup> Most appear to have accommodated women's presence, many clearly so, with some serving as women-only venues. By early October, the *Comité des Femmes de la rue d'Arras*,<sup>3</sup> in the V arrondissement, convened its first meeting.<sup>116</sup> Noting that, "men will be admitted to this meeting," it called on women from all arrondissements having an interest in social issues to come to the meeting. As a subscript, the *affiche* indicates that this committee of women concerned itself with "all questions of interest to women in *la Société*." Demonstrating women's organization preceding this date, the announcement claims a collective of 1,800 adherents, 160 active

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 331.

<sup>114</sup> Brocher, *Souvenirs*, 133.

<sup>115</sup> Molinari, *Les Clubs Rouges*, 42. Molinari accurately mentions in his introduction that while orators, newspapers, and clubs not espousing a Commune line were sometimes silenced during the Commune, the club scene between 4 September 1870 and their closure after 22 January 1871 was truly an exercise in free speech.

<sup>116</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/Mairie du V<sup>e</sup> arrondissement (1352-X/10-MP-V), V-52; *Murailles*, I, 183. The fact the address is so specifically indicated in the club name indicates a number of committees meeting on that street.

committees, and Secretaries in each arrondissement.<sup>117</sup> “Questions of interest” for women were many, and on 30 October, *Le Rappel* inserted a notice entitled, *Comité des femmes*, calling for a public meeting that day at rue de Paris, 13.<sup>118</sup> Their “*ordre du jour*”? “Work for women” and “New democratic [secular] schools.” Work and education held consistent interest for women, but food provided a particularly gendered perspective on the challenges of the siege.

In public clubs, especially those where women gathered, the quotidian issue of food formed the hub of many debates as women participated in direct democracy. On 6 November at the *Club Favié* in Belleville, a debate took place about the petite bourgeoisie’s role in the present misery. Revealing his understanding of women’s roles in food procurement, a man shouted, “ask the *citoyennes* in the auditorium what [the petite bourgeoisie] give them when they go to buy something with four *sous* – some horse pudding!” The *citoyennes* in attendance responded, “Yes! Yes! It’s an outrage!”<sup>119</sup> At the same club on 19 November, questions to be voted on were directed at the *citoyennes* in the crowd in order to gain overall support.<sup>120</sup> Direct democracy demanded input from all relevant sources: *citoyennes* were relevant. Club women also accepted roles in political change.

By 29 December, when Paris had little food, fuel, or other means of resistance, surviving clubs found women willing to lead men in revolutionary political change. The same *Club Favié* in starving Belleville continued to meet, but many others dwindled due

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> *Le Rappel*, 30 October 1870.

<sup>119</sup> Molinari, *Clubs Rouge*, 66.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 98.

to lack of heat, light, or public interest beyond mere survival. This late December meeting found a speaker declaring that the “moment has come to create the Commune” and that, if the men hesitated, “the women would show them the road to the *Hôtel de Ville*,” where the October declaration of the Commune had occurred and where the remnants of the Government of National Defense resided. Women shouted in response, “Oui! Oui! We will go first!”<sup>121</sup> The phrasing indicates that women would lead – even force – men to make political change, but that men would assume representative leadership when that change occurred. Women would “show” men the way, not replace them in the political structure. Still, the image of women leading a change in government met with collective acceptance by women, foreshadowing future events. Women also served as witnesses against government ineptitude or worse.

On that same date, another discussion about high death tolls led one woman to offer her experience to the club attendees so that pressure could be brought to bear on officials. The group suspected city and national government officials of hiding accurate death rates.<sup>122</sup> They appear upset because a lower official death count might imply to the public that the government was doing more to aid the poor than this group believed. Those in attendance saw officials as little concerned with impoverished Belleville workers, perhaps preferring them dead. Ill-believing doctors’ cause of death declarations, one participant left the meeting to find out more information about two recent deaths.<sup>123</sup> Next, a woman offered her relevant testimony. While queued in ration lines for hours

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 200.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.



that morning, her child had died in her arms. Its extremities were frozen and she was unable to wake her little one, as she stood in line for wood. Unless pressured to do otherwise, the woman and her club associates believed the government and its doctors might argue her child's death as simply a result of the winter and poverty that were part of Paris life every year. Club participants did not want deaths specifically attendant to the siege to become invisible in official records.<sup>124</sup> Her poignant description reminded participants that even during this desperate hour, they must do all they could not to forget the "large part of Belleville's population, made up in large part of workers without work."<sup>125</sup> If the government would not help them – and worse, lie about them for statistical advantage – Belleville's residents would assert pressure. In this club, participants of both sexes offered themselves as material witnesses, voters, Commune supporters, and a force for government and medical accountability. Their actions, however, centered on food.

By 7 January 1871 at the I arrondissement club on rue Jean-Jacques-Rousseau, the orator believed that the most dangerous enemy was famine. This was surely the case and most historians have agreed that the blockade, not the intense bombardment after 5 January 1871, was the primary cause of the end of the siege.<sup>126</sup> The speaker gave the rational analysis that "we are already eating rats, who are, among many, our enemies; we

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<sup>124</sup> This argument raises the question of whether official siege-related death tolls – quite high in any event – may have been higher than government records indicate. If determined to be the case, this suggests that the siege reduced the population of workers in Paris, as well as the next generation of workers among the children, to a greater degree than previously thought. It also raises questions about the interests and functioning of the Government of National Defense, which have not previously been assessed.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Tombs, "The Wars Against Paris," 549.

also eat cats, who are – on the contrary – our friends.”<sup>127</sup> Increased agitation towards government decisions and its seeming ineptitude linked its agents with rats and Prussians, also enemies of clubists. By 12 January in the *Club de la Revindication*, meeting on the passage du Génie in the XII arrondissement, club observer, Molinari, comments that not many people had come to this obscure location. Still, “the women and children of the neighborhood come there sometimes to save light and find a bit of warmth while crowded in together; their worn clothing forms a sad contrast with the new jackets and colorful *cache-nez* seen among the male population at the meeting.”<sup>128</sup> That freezing women and children and amply-clad men were in attendance here implies that the women’s male class counterparts were serving elsewhere, perhaps in the stead of wealthier men. According to the observer, women sought warmth for themselves and their children as part of club attendance; the men’s reasons are less clear. However, some sufficiently-attired men – such as Vignix, for example – also verged on starvation by January, exposing that a heated room may have held value for many.

Molinari next indicates his ongoing focus on women in club meetings, a focus later diminished by historians. He adds, “No doubt everyone had their own hardships . . . but the women and children, not forgetting the ill and infirmed – in a word, the weak – have they not, above all, born most of the misery and suffering?”<sup>129</sup> Although viewing women as a component of the “weak” despite their survival and responsibilities, Molinari

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<sup>127</sup> Molinari, *Les Clubs Rouges*, 216-17. The fact cats eat rats, renown carriers of disease and thieves of edible food, was not lost on the poor, but evidently was lost on some making the various edicts which famously required cats to be killed and consumed.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 234.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid. André Léo later commented that the biggest victim of the siege was “la femme pauvre sans soutien.” IISH/Descaves/André Léo.

enunciated women's trials during the siege. However, he does not clarify that the children, ill, and infirmed also received care from women. Surprisingly, given that he draws substantially from Molinari, historian Alain Dalotel argues against the idea that poor women attended clubs in great numbers. Offering no evidence for his conclusions, Dalotel apparently resists the perspectives of Molinari and André Léo, to name two contemporary observers. Dalotel writes that it is "highly unlikely that these victims [poor women] frequented the clubs," adding that women's intervention was limited during the siege to a few "notorious militants like Nathalie Lemel."<sup>130</sup> Dalotel appears to see the clubs through the lens of some of the male attendees who appear not to have appreciated women's mocking tone towards the "wanna-be soldiers" who often occupied the podium at the club Favié.<sup>131</sup> Belleville working women did not always align with Belleville's uniformed men. By January, club women, in addition to Malenfant Rouchy, expressed less agitation towards their own hunger than towards those who appeared not to suffer.

By 16 January 1871, the *Club Favié* in Belleville reveals that some women believed drastic, gendered measures should be taken. Before the meeting officially opened, the *type* that for Malenfant Rouchy might include Edmund Goncourt, received harassment from attendees. As women in attendance put it, "they aren't suffering from bread rationing and their patriotism and willingness for *la défense à outrance* depends on

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<sup>130</sup> Dalotel, "Les femmes dans les clubs rouges 1870-1871," 294. As this is among the very few articles that address women's activities during the siege, this perspective is especially problematic for the historiography of the topic.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 293. The term in regard to the soldiers is "s'improvisant." However, the tone of the women, along with their reported chuckles in response to men's "virilized" comments at the club Favié, from which Dalotel is drawing, imply my translation.

our stomachs.”<sup>132</sup> They specifically added, “we who don’t have any more bread to eat, can we live on [the rations of] 44 grams of bread a day?” More than one woman gave examples of mistreatment while in line for bread and one had witnessed a mother who had been brutalized by a *garde du corps civique* on rue de Meaux, because, the guard said, she had brought a child with her.<sup>133</sup> She subsequently fell down, breaking her arm. Once the meeting was called to order, a woman responded that, “when Jerusalem fell, the women threw the hesitant [male] defenders down on their enemy from high up on the walls, in place of stones or debris,” suggesting that many of the bourgeoisie could be used likewise.<sup>134</sup> At least in Belleville, anonymous working women did not see themselves aligned with all Parisians against Prussians. Clubs provided a public forum for their complaints. Molinari’s reportage includes no personal commentary on the opinions expressed in clubs. He indicates that women saw their concerns as central to the issues of the siege, sometimes clearly disassociating their analysis from that of men’s.

By mid-January, discouragement and agitation filled many remaining clubs; rumors abounded, prominently featuring women. In the XVIII arrondissement’s *Club de la Révolution, Élysée-Montmartre* on 18 January, rumors about capitulation included the threat of Prussians “tak[ing] for themselves the women who are to their taste,” which visibly agitated the *citoyennes* in attendance.<sup>135</sup> By 21 January in the *Club de la Reine-Blanche* in Montmartre, emotions ran high and the National Guard were invited to take up their arms immediately, the women offering “to accompany them to protest against the

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 246-7.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 262.

rationing of bread and other measures.”<sup>136</sup> The self-exiled Government of National Defense would soon insure that Parisians would have fewer forums for these comments.

In response to a second declaration of the Commune on 22 January 1870, on 23 January, the Government of National Defense closed all clubs.<sup>137</sup> Their posted explanation was that certain clubs had been the sites of “criminal excitations,” that “civil war had been engaged in by some agitators,” and that the “present circumstances are a danger to the nation.”<sup>138</sup> The fourth article of the decree, actually signed on 22 January, indicates that clubs must remain suppressed until the end of the siege. All locations were to be closed, with punishment assured if the edict was disobeyed. The siege-era clubs held in municipal buildings were forums for thousands of anonymous members of the working classes; therefore, this decree especially targeted them. However, Molinari observed that in general, attendance had dropped off substantially and that male workers had become less prominent at meetings. If so, this indicates that the number of participants did not necessarily have to be great in order to be threatening. Additionally, a significant part of the threat evidently included women, with the closures specifically affecting them, not only male Commune plotters. Forums for public, political speech would immediately reopen with the advent of the Commune. In the meantime, some club members, including women, unofficially met in the coming few weeks before the advent of the Commune. By the first week in February, six “open air” clubs and a couple of electoral meetings had met in the I, XI, XIII, XVIII, and XIX arrondissements, though

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>137</sup> See, *Murailles, I*, 787 for Commune declaration.

<sup>138</sup> Molinari, *Les Clubs Rouges*, 270. The closings mirror those of 1848, although in that case, women’s clubs were initially the particular targets.

attendance was limited.<sup>139</sup> For many, clubs linked the siege to the Commune; the official proclamation of their demise did not sever that link.

### **Women as Suspects**

As early as 28 September, the Governor of Paris, Trochu, indicated his concern about the possibilities of women and children aiding the Prussians, and the resultant penalties. His declaration in part states, “it is public knowledge that men, women, and children freely pass between the areas around the forts [outside the walls of Paris].”<sup>140</sup> Although noting that some had legitimate reason for doing so, such as the destruction of their homes by the bombardment, others “enter the enemy camps where they are welcomed and where they maintain criminal relations [with the enemy].” He concluded his public warning by stating the penalty for such movements. “Each individual who knowingly [violates] this present order, will be [arrested] by military authority, and referred by it to a court martial. If, despite [warnings], [the individual] attempts to escape, the guards will shoot [the individual].”<sup>141</sup> Individuals, in this case, could be women, children, or men. The ungendered term, matched with specific mention of women as part of the collective threat, includes women as specific objects of police and military observation. They were suspects. This early warning to residents of Paris and its surroundings indicates not only the context of martial law for autumn 1870. It exposes the connections between civilian activities and military law, which brought future communardes before military tribunals in the coming years. Trochu’s words also clearly

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<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>140</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/SCPV-29, 53; *Murailles I*, 116.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

implicate women, and even children, as appropriate targets for military arrest, trial, and even death.

On 12 October, certain women found themselves as “potential delinquents” according to the conservative, *Le Gaulois*. The newspaper listed six categories of suspects who could prove threatening to the nation in these trying times. They included, 1) merchants who avoid taxes; 2) beggars; 3) vagrants at night; 4) deserters; 5) individuals who, by alarming people or giving false news, demoralize *citoyens*; and 6) women (not using the term, *citoyennes*) who, by their attitude or their words, provoke scandal and increase disorder.<sup>142</sup> With the exception of category four, women could be included in all of these, although certainly category six directly targets their potential threat. Whether the phrase, “women who provoke scandal and increase disorder” aimed its suspicion particularly at women considered prostitutes is unclear. By the Commune, women’s threatening ability to “alarm people,” “demoralize *citoyens*” – perhaps those avoiding Guard service – and “increase disorder” already had a history.

Laundresses, as part of the suspicious, “*sexualité féminine*,” as one author put it, became particular subjects of concern, but any woman could prove worthy of surveillance. Information in a 6 October *Le Figaro* article supported a prohibition on the movement of laundresses between Paris and its environs, believing they “might be spies for M. de Bismark.”<sup>143</sup> Laundresses were not the only women under observation and suspicion, although a number of Commune arrestees would state their profession as such. The 7 October *Le Figaro* noted that, “last night, the wife of an officer captured at Sedan

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<sup>142</sup> *Le Gaulois*, 12 Octobre 1870.

<sup>143</sup> *Le Figaro*, 6 Octobre 1870.

was arrested as a spy.”<sup>144</sup> With such a wide rubric of suspicion, “women who, by their attitude or their words, provoke scandal and increase disorder” could include most anyone. Women’s ability to transgress political and military boundaries, including city walls and “national” demarcations, allowed them certain opportunities – economic and otherwise. However, these transgressive opportunities could also bring them under suspicion.

Malenfant Rouchy, Lamber Adam, and their associates in citizen service had claimed their right to venture past city walls into front line positions. Others, like Bréton, tended wounded in their homes and fed the hungry from their stores. All had to find food, usually at the end of hours-long lines. Barricades needed sandbags sewn and *pavés* raised. The government needed women’s citizen surveillance of neighbors to find hidden caches of food and fuel. Freedom of expression in clubs accommodated a venting of gendered frustrations against the haves – including those shirking military service in defense of *la patrie*. Even those whose interests were less animated against the government exiled at Bordeaux saw their means, health, and patience sorely tested as the months of siege wore on. As such, *affiches* plastered on walls and columns about Paris, clubs set in public spaces, notices by and about women in the newspapers, women queued for rations, and poor women banging on the doors of the *maires* begging for bread, marked the “terrain of political practice” that was the siege.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> *Le Figaro*, 7 October 1870.

<sup>145</sup> Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space*, 8. Ross, analyzing the Commune as a “primarily spatial event,” uses this phrase to situate the “ethics of combat” of the Paris Commune. It is also appropriate here in describing Parisians’ quotidian exposure to women’s lives and to their developing antagonism towards those in power who seemed unable or unwilling to help.



## Bombardment and Armistice

On 5 January 1871, the German shelling of the city began, continuing to 26 January. Bombardment added to the plight of women and to the overall misery of the city.<sup>146</sup> Geneviève Bréton commented on enduring the shelling on 9 January, while Joseph Vignix listed “*Les Victimes du Bombardement de Paris*” for the days of 5-13 January.<sup>147</sup> He divided the victims by sex category, also noting how many children had been killed. His totals within Paris include 51 killed, of which 18 were children, 12 were women, and 21 were men; of the 138 wounded, 21 were children, 45 were women, and 72 were men. Therefore, according to his careful account, 96 women and children had been killed, as opposed to 93 men. The Prussians aimed for and found civilians – as Malenfant Rouchy and Lamber Adam had previously suggested regarding the *maraudeurs*. Vignix noted on 16 January the hundreds of shells falling on the Right Bank, adding that “more women, more children, more old people [were] assassinated. *C’est la fête de Guillaume.*”<sup>148</sup> German Emperor Wilhelm concluded that it was “necessary to frighten the sovereign Paris mob . . . which has the final word” into surrendering; Prussian War Minister von Roon called Paris, “the House of Satan.”<sup>149</sup> Given the Government of National Defense was nowhere near Paris, its residents were the target of his wrath. Just as Bismarck and Wilhelm saw civilian targets in Paris as not only appropriate, but absolutely necessary, so would French President Adolphe Thiers in May 1871. Prussian bombardment prompted artists to create patriotic images of

<sup>146</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/(GND-38) 149; *Murailles, I*, 701.

<sup>147</sup> Allen, *The Diary of Geneviève Bréton*, 164. NWU/Siege of Paris/ms: Vignix, Joseph-André, 1869-1871, 69.

<sup>148</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/ms: Vignix, Joseph-André, 1869-1871, 70.

<sup>149</sup> Tombs, “The Wars Against Paris,” 545.

women's positions in the fight.

As the Prussians applied increasing military pressure to Paris, prominent artists created images describing events, designed to incite a last-ditch support for the republic. These images prominently feature women and children as objects of Prussian warfare. They often represent women as patriotic victims or perhaps victimized patriots. Gustave Doré's, *The Overturned Cradle*, depicts the "rape of domestic life, of non-combatants killed."<sup>150</sup> In it, a traumatized woman in flowing gown blankly stares at her dead child sprawled on the floor of her home, the bricks of the outside wall blown away by a bomb, revealing the city outside. Another image, this one by Debrosses and bearing the title, "The enemy is killing our women and children!!!" reveals similar concerns.<sup>151</sup> A woman reaches upwards toward the heavens, as a child lies crushed, covered by a table, the ceiling now scarred by a ragged hole. The exposure of the private world of passive and proper women to the public world of war – in pictures and reality – demonstrates that by late January 1871, total war had demolished significant boundaries of public/private restricting women's lives. In theory, the boundaries were to protect them, but had not. For many women the former gendered boundaries will not realign so easily, especially since material conditions did not quickly improve, despite the eventual end of formal war.

Along with the bombing came worsening day-to-day circumstances, as well as increased agitation by those more apt to ally with the Commune. Rationing became more profound, and the bread available was black, meat and fresh produce, virtually

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<sup>150</sup> Milner, *Art, War and Revolution in France 1870-1871*, 115.

<sup>151</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/Etchings/pf9, Debrosses, #112.

nonexistent. The day after the failed attempt to establish the Commune on 22 January, “vestiges of agitation” remained, with a few armed groups among the numerous and frustrated crowds, which, as always, included women.<sup>152</sup> The same day, destructive fires burned in St. Denis and elsewhere, the result of the bombardment. Women, not bombardment, will be blamed for later Bloody Week fires, and similar fires in January did not draw accusations about *pétroleuses*. With clubs closed and most of the population starving but resisting surrender, on 28 January 1871, the bombardment and siege of Paris ended. Even after the formal diplomatic end to the war and the siege, women had plenty of problems still to address.

Malenfant Rouchy discovered that her husband was prisoner, but gained two laissez-passers to go get him at Orléans. Finally on 31 January the trains began running again.<sup>153</sup> On the train to Orléans, she sat with a young father with a baby a few weeks old, whose mother had died in childbirth. Everyone looked near death. The father’s challenge of not being able to find milk for his young child reflects Malenfant Rouchy’s earlier problems and foreshadows her loss still to come.<sup>154</sup> The father’s baby, like her own child and adopted charge, died in front of her eyes.<sup>155</sup> Malenfant Rouchy’s one-year old, Gabriel, whom she had stopped breastfeeding when the siege began, was buried on 14 March. His older adoptive brother (for whom Mme Malenfant had found the carrots) became sadder. She recalled him uttering, “I also want to go with him,” and he died eight

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<sup>152</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/ms: Vignix, Joseph-André, 1869-1871, 81.

<sup>153</sup> Brocher, *Souvenirs*, 135.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 136-7.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 138.

days later, just as the Commune began.<sup>156</sup> If she felt responsible – or took harassment – for ceasing to breastfeed or proving unable to keep her child alive, she does not say. Given death rates, the fact both children had survived the siege, if not the effects of it, speaks to the skills and sacrifice of both Malenfant women. The fact the family was not in dire straits before the siege and that the women could work as a team to use savings, earnings, and their time to aid their household proved to be valuable assets. Still, they could not keep either child alive. In her pain, she exclaimed, “Dieu! Patrie! République! . . . I needed another ideal.”<sup>157</sup>

February brought elections for the National Assembly on the third, and an end of the Government of National Defense on the sixteenth, but not an end to the misery of women, children, or most others.<sup>158</sup> Ambulance work and ateliers continued during this month, although the ateliers began receiving less work and funding, as regular businesses slowly opened and military needs lagged. Supplies did not necessarily improve or increase quickly. Between the armistice on 28 January 1871 and the triumphal march of the Prussian army through Paris on the first of March, the Prussian threat against Parisian women and children resounded in posted rhetoric. In one example for 26-27 February, a Captain Brette posted that “the Prussian Nebucadnezzar is preparing to parade before our wives, our daughters, our fiancées

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 149-151.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 151. The next page of her memoir begins her record of the Commune; for the moment, this would be her new ideal. However, she later became an avowed anarchist.

<sup>158</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/Mairie du XX arrondissement (1352-X/10-MP-XX), XX-17; XX-19.

... will we let the Prussians ravish our homes?”<sup>159</sup> On 28 February, the mayor of the XI arrondissement, Jules Mottu, expressed less hyperbole, calling on “*citoyens et citoyennes*” to be calm. He pled with them to “remain in [their] closed up residences,” while the Prussians – with the acquiescence of the present French government – walked the streets of Paris beginning 1 March.

Although virtually everyone of both sex categories avoided the streets of Paris while the Prussians occupied them, the rhetoric and implications of keeping women inside reveals gendered concerns, both patriotic and otherwise. The public/private, male/female republican divides relevant to citizenship and social life more generally had been ignored, disrupted, and violated for months. Individually, women could see their public roles as a defense of their homes and families, linking their actions to more traditional gendered norms. However, in a new republic, the discourse surrounding them on *affiches* and in newspapers more regularly called on citizens to defend their city, their country, the Republic. The Prussians aimed at civilians in what has since been termed Europe’s first modern total war. As such, women were combatants in ways that did not necessarily have a precedent. Fears that men alone could not protect women and children had a basis in the realities of military assaults outside city walls and in the bombardment of Paris proper. The battlefield and home front converged. With an end to the siege, prior gender norms evidently were supposed to return, in this case, virtually by decree: men would protect their “wives, daughters, and fiancées,” despite the fact they had not

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<sup>159</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/Box 5, 14A & 14B, Broadsides and Posters/pf3 (Comm. 1-2 B); *Murailles*, I, 966. The regular use of *violer* in this type of poster adds to the intensity of the rhetoric, as ravish, violate, and rape can be implied.

been entirely successful in doing so during the preceding months. That women had served in armed *volontaire* capacities and at the front lines in *cantinière* and *ambulancière* roles spoke against the façade of gendered “protection” rhetoric now greeting working women. Working women, and even those of other classes who had remained in Paris during the siege, could not easily align the actual gendered organization of both public and private with those dichotomous demands.

This chapter argued that the disruptions and severity of the siege altered gender norms, along with the economy, political climate, and social relationships. Military law, while limiting in some ways, looped citizens of Paris – including *citoyennes* – into military-associated roles. However, what representatives of the Government of National Defense deemed “respectable” female behavior also expanded during the siege, contributing to women of all classes finding legitimate access to public political space and knowledge, often previously denied them. When women capably presented themselves for service in military capacities, *citoyens* acted to remove *citoyennes* further from possible consideration for the privileges of citizenship. Still, *citoyennes* like Malenfant Rouchy discursively argued their case. Clubs, contact with government officials and military personnel, living around barricades, and enlistment in military units – as *ambulancières* or otherwise – brought women into public, militarized arenas. Their attempts to scrounge for food and wait in ration lines made even the most privileged aware of their numbers and suffering. Police kept tabs on some and military rulings included them as potential enemies of the *patrie en danger*. The boundaries between appropriate and inappropriate female behavior became increasingly blurred, creating a

greater range of appropriate activities for women given the harsh conditions of total war.

Additionally, front-line, municipal, and private medical work; *cantinière* and other supply-line labor; and the increased significance of food provisioning indicate the Republic's blatant call on *citoyennes* for support. Republican clubs not only included women, sometimes as voting members, but also indicate that free speech encouraged women to adamantly assert their gendered concerns. Some male clubists appear to have taken women's presence and concerns directly into account. Parisian women's free speech, political clout, and military assistance increased over the months of the siege. These combined factors augmented their visibility, encouraging their collective right to defend, even aggressively fight for, their *patrie en danger*. With the siege ended, national and municipal leadership hoped for a return to former gender preconceptions, where men protected women by returning them to the demarcations of the private sphere. Yet, that hope did little to resolve the economic and social problems still confronting the popular classes in Paris. In addition to the economic devastation resulting from the siege, quotidian modifications in class, gender, and sex categories and relationships had occurred in Paris, augmenting women's ability to participate in the revolution of 18 March.

### III. “VIVE LA COMMUNE! ”: WOMEN’S VERBAL OCCUPATION OF COMMUNE SPACE (18 MARCH-28 MAY 1871)

On 18 March 1871, the Commune erupted. It began differently than had the siege-era attempts of 31 October 1870 and 22 January 1871, in which male citizens attempted to seize formal political power with verbal and published statements of intent. On this day, the Commune’s genesis did not see traditional revolutionary backroom plotting followed by occupation of government halls. Instead, on 18 March, women’s shouts and threats rained down on French government soldiers and the cannon they had been sent to seize. Early on that morning, working women of Montmartre then “covered the cannon with their bodies.” They spent the morning berated the military with their angry verbal taunts, challenging men’s political protocols, military orders, and social masculinity. Poor military planning that left soldiers unable to remove the cannon quickly contributed to the persuasive arguments that made soldiers unwilling to proceed. Shouts of, “Vive la Commune!” accompanied shouts of, “Vive la République!” as women, National Guards, children, and other men forced the troops’ retreat from the city. Women’s occupation of this political space included the most basic component of republican or democratic action: speech.

This chapter argues that women’s speech during the Commune reveals motivations for their participation in events. Many women of the popular classes often employing a gendered articulation – even critique – of the New Order the Commune offered. The terrible events of the siege contributed to the vociferous analysis of working women and sometimes, those who had allied with them during recent hardships. In addition, women’s siege experiences and organization allowed them to mobilize quickly.



This chapter exposes the immediate development of public forums for speech. Women again met in clubs, this time in appropriated churches, rather than municipal halls. The streets also provided unnamed women important spaces for rhetorical assertions.

Mapping women's commentary and exhortations demonstrates here that women took part in all arrondissements of Paris, heard in the IV as much as the XVIII, with the XIV and XVI not immune to women-dominated forums calling for change. Their audible visibility not only means that gendered tribulations were noticeable to many throughout Paris, but also that the geographical breadth of this "working-class" revolution covered far more than Montmartre and its environs. While communardes may or may not have been numerically dominant in Paris, neither were the National Guard or Commune and municipal government leaders. Yet they have received the bulk of attention in assessing the historical meaning of the Commune. Prioritizing gender makes the interests of the popular classes – not just those of their formal political or military leadership – more generally visible.

Overall, this chapter argues that women of a range of classes often saw the revolution of the Commune, including its promise of a new social order, through their gendered, daily experiences; their use of verbal discussion and debate reveals their "feminist" concerns long before the term existed.<sup>1</sup> The writings of Eliska Vincent and Juliette Lamber Adam, for example, divulge consistently feminist outlooks decades

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<sup>1</sup> Claire Moses contends that the questions feminists asked in the 19<sup>th</sup> century were based on their life experiences, not just ideologies. Women's experiences, therefore, can reveal feminist concerns before the term was used. *French Feminism in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* (Albany: State University of New York, 1984), ix.

before they identified with the term, only developed in the 1880s.<sup>2</sup> This chapter also makes the case that men, including male leadership elected in the wake of women's 18 March declaration, viewed women's participation as crucial to the Commune's success. This correlated with Ernest Blum's arguments during the siege. However, centering the scope of gender analysis on sources by and about women demonstrates an inconsistent alignment between men and women during the Commune. That is, how men hoped to incorporate women's support and how women actually evinced that support were often quite different.

The chapter includes notice of the fact that police honed their observations of what women had to say, contributing to their post-Commune arrests; oral transmission of information served as a foundation of their prosecutions. What women said mattered to those surveilling them. This point does not mean that working women and their observers understood or recorded words in the same way. However, the attention paid them by unsympathetic sources implies their significance in that moment – a significance frequently omitted by later historians. As one example of women's centrality, the very first group of prisoners requested by Versailles-based military courts included 1) Members of the Commune's government; 2) Military leadership of the Commune, and 3) "*Pétroleuses*," meaning women accused of setting fires or otherwise involved with the

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<sup>2</sup> For the earliest use of the term, Karen Offen, "On the French Origin of the Words Feminism and Feminist," *Feminist Issues* 7, No. 2 (Fall 1988), 126. Vincent and Lamber Adam serve as two examples of women who later adopted the term for themselves, but do not imply I consider women's actions as feminist only if they self-identify with the term.

final defense of the Commune.<sup>3</sup> Commune government and military leaders left substantial paper trails, some of which linked them to women's organizations. However, accusations of "*pétroleuse*" generally relied on oral trails, indicated by hearsay testimony and verbal, often unsigned denunciations. Much like earlier witch trials or when other threats of terror are presumed, police encouraged arrestees to condemn others. Records of trials and requests for pardons remain embedded with files in which the names and testimony of three or four defendants are entwined within seemingly one case. In these situations, defendants tried to separate themselves from the guilt of another. "A neighbor," "a passerby," or "the defendant's concierge" – whether or not at the time the accused knew their names – does not specify the name of an accuser. Their words nonetheless contributed mightily to conviction. "Gossip" morphed into "eye-witness testimony."

Even when her "signed" testimony appears, a woman often signed or made her mark under what had been written by a bureaucrat in clear calligraphy. If illiterate to any degree, her understanding of what she was signing had been transmitted orally. She was allowed to request wording changes if she did not believe the transmission to reflect her words. However, records remain silent as to who requested wording changes – indicated by lines crossed-out – or the dates changes occurred. By her signature or mark, a woman may only have been witnessing that the essence, rather than a line-by-line transcription, of what she said was included in the document.

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<sup>3</sup> APP/Ba368/pétroleuses. This initial call for women prisoners included the names of 53 women, only five charged with setting fires. As Edith Thomas demonstrated, the term "*pétroleuse*" initially meant any "unruly" women associated with communarde activities, whether or not accused of setting fires.

All of these points indicate that a clear understanding of women's intentions gleaned only from police and trial records is suspect. Still, suspicions raise their own questions, here implying the value of other types of records. Trial-associated records have served as the basis for most generalizations about women's involvement. As mentioned, however, Eugene Schulkind noted the relevant problems stemming from that fact. Additionally, most women in Paris during the Commune did not go to trial, and until now thousands who were arrested and later released have received scant notice and no analysis.<sup>4</sup> Further, the majority who escaped detection or at least arrest, despite participation in some fashion, became silently invisible.<sup>5</sup> Coupling trial-related records with other sources therefore becomes especially important in beginning to assess the significance of the words of so many ordinary women. Within memoirs and letters, women's descriptions of what other women said contribute to a broader view of the range of verbal statements made while the Commune survived. Male observers' writings, such as those by Abbé Fontoulieu about club women, prove more valuable when compared with other types of sources presenting the words of women. If a precise account of the range of women's verbal expressions does not yet exist, this dissertation nonetheless takes them seriously, offering a look at women's gendered visions for the Commune.

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<sup>4</sup> As one example, Carolyn Eichner demonstrates that police followed Paule Mink, who escaped France after the Commune, until the day of her burial on May Day 1901, creating 30 years worth of detailed files. Mink, who never was arrested or went to trial, nonetheless was worthy of constant police observation. Her files are quite possibly the largest of any former communarde. See, "'Vive la Commune!': Feminism, Socialism, and Revolutionary Revival in the Aftermath of the 1871 Paris Commune," *Journal of Women's History* 15, No. 2 (Summer 2003): 68-98.

<sup>5</sup> Future research may indicate whether a woman's Commune-era activities appear substantially relevant for police, lawyers, and judges involved in arrests of women in later years. If so, women's Commune visibility may increase with assessments of those records.

Noting the variety of sources in which a woman's name, words, or actions appear, also validates – and multiplies – her visibility.

Commune chapters here draw from a collection of approximately 2,000 names of women who appear in archival and published records created during the Commune. Over 1,200 names culled from these sources have not been previously noted when analyzing women's Commune activities.<sup>6</sup> A name on a roster indicating beneficiaries of National Guard benefits turns up as a notation in police files. A name on an ambulance list of wounded appears also on a Union of Women registry. The significance of the individual is not always presently clear, but exposes the documentation of women's presence during events. Sifting through archival and primary sources for women's names also highlights how often observation was gendered. Women's words and actions stood out. This methodology allows an increase in the number of historical subjects and potentially, the amount of information available about an individual. At times, a variety of references aids in countering the bias of prosecutorial sources. Over time, this layering of references is likely to clarify the valuable roles played by many more women. Currently, almost one-half of the names discovered appear in more than one source, with just under 25 percent in three or more.<sup>7</sup> Different sources often reveal different, relevant information. Additionally, references to “the cook,” “the woman standing next to the *mitrailleuse*,” “the crowd of hundreds of women,” or “the group of prostitutes usually at the café” are woven into Commune chapters, exposing the visible presence of nonetheless anonymous

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<sup>6</sup> Eugene Schulkind had several hundred names matched with their archival references, although most remain all but invisible in Commune narratives.

<sup>7</sup> These percentages – 48.7% and 24.6%, respectively - will shift with further refinement of the database components and additional time in the archives, but are indicative of a consistent trend.

women. Noticing the gendered components of those phrases encourages me to keep a running account of these active yet unnamed women, including a geographical reference of the sighting, where possible.<sup>8</sup>

Also assessed in this chapter, while police observed women, women verbally targeted police forces as enemies of the new, Commune order, with those tables ultimately turned when the Commune collapsed. With fewer restrictions on their words and actions than had been the case during the siege, in gendered fashion, some communardes harassed, even arrested, the wives of police thought to be sheltering their husbands. After the Commune, their reported and admitted words often convicted women of these “illegal” acts. Women, in particular, appear to have provoked arrests of recalcitrant men, as well as police wives. With the Commune’s demise, police records show the avalanche of paperwork necessary to process the unparalleled number of women detainees. They overwhelmed the police who begged for relief from the military judicial system, then prosecuting suspects. As demonstrated here, some women’s verbal expressions contributed to their summary executions in Paris or along the road to Versailles, which left so many women dead during the Bloody Week of 21-28 May. The gendered attention paid them by police and military personnel demonstrates the threat they posed to the men of the Moral Order, who were to represent the Republic.

Some women ended their lives with the words, “Vive la Commune!” on their lips. Others, like Paule Mink, shouted them as they crossed into Switzerland, exiles for ten

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<sup>8</sup> While names are not the only determination of an actor’s significance, it is the only way I presently have to identify individuals.

years before a general amnesty.<sup>9</sup> Although some of the more well-known women of the Commune, such as André Léo, Elizabeth Dmitrieff, and Paule Mink escaped police scrutiny and France, as Carolyn Eichner's recent work analyzes, most working women did not. They drew the attention of police and military personnel bent on their arrests, even executions. Caricatures came to represent the Commune as gendered female, as Gay Gullickson has aptly demonstrated. However, real women – and the words they articulated – began, sustained, and challenged it.

### **February and Early March**

As Malenfant Rouchy made a point to summarize, the National Assembly, still at Bordeaux, feared the 400,000 weapons still in the hands of Franco-Prussian War combatants. More accurately, they feared the people who still possessed those arms: the members of the National Guard of Paris and the Parisian “mob” more generally.<sup>10</sup> In Paris, which never wanted to capitulate in the first place, agitation grew. The Republic now was to pay the Germans five million francs as an indemnity, much to come directly from Paris, having held out against the Prussians for so long. Summarizing the attitudes of many who had survived the siege, Malenfant Rouchy concludes, “where better to get it than the pockets of the worker?”<sup>11</sup> The economic squeeze experienced by working Parisians increased on 10 March. On that date, the conservative National Assembly

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<sup>9</sup> See Eichner's analysis of Paule Mink's Commune era work in, ““Vive la Commune!”” and *Surmounting the Barricades* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Victorine Brocher, *Souvenirs d'une morte vivante* (Paris: François Maspero, 1977[1909]), 155. The National Guard remained one of the few groups not disarmed under the terms of the armistice. See Robert Tombs, “The Wars Against Paris,” *On the Road to Total War: The American Civil War and the German Wars of Unification, 1861-1871*, Stig Förster and Jörg Nagler, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 552-3.

<sup>11</sup> Brocher, *Souvenirs*, 155.

voted to transfer itself to Versailles from Bordeaux, but not to the Parisian capital. This further postponed economic recovery for those whose jobs depended on the presence of government personnel.<sup>12</sup> As the nation of Germany had recently been declared at the same location on 18 January while Emperor Wilhelm resided there, the move escalated Parisian resentment toward the new leaders ensconced at Versailles.

Aggravations crescendoed. On 10 March, the Assembly also voted to abolish the moratorium on rents, making all present and back rents from the siege payable within the month.<sup>13</sup> This immediately threatened over 40,000 businesses with bankruptcy.<sup>14</sup> All items held in government pawn shops were to be bought back within the same timeframe or sold. As far as the popular classes were concerned, workers' tools and household items became hostages of their owners' economic oppressors. By 11 March, General Vinoy had suppressed six newspapers, and popular radical republicans Louis Blanqui and Gustave Flourens had been condemned to death in absentia.<sup>15</sup> President Thiers and his Assembly feared the mob of Paris, yet seemed determined to push them towards insurrection. Less-advantaged members of the working classes, most still unemployed, did not feel appreciated for their valiant defense of the capital and many still faced hunger and illness. Government actions also indicated to many that their own government feared its patriotic citizens more than the external enemies, from which

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<sup>12</sup> The Third Republic would not officially return to Paris until 1879.

<sup>13</sup> One of the simplest and most complete chronologies is published in *La Commune, Paris 1871*, (Paris: Nathan, 2000), a photographic essay of events. While some repayments technically were due in 48 hours, others would not be due for up to four months. For most, all deadlines were equally impossible to meet.

<sup>14</sup> George J. Becker, ed., *Paris Under Siege, 1870-1871: From the Goncourt Journal* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1969), 18.

<sup>15</sup> Blanqui would be arrested a few days later. Flourens would be assassinated by a gendarme on 3 April 1871.



Parisians had defended *la patrie*.

Municipal posters all over Paris, however, promoted the impression that employment, food, and ongoing maintenance of the National Guard were primary. On 4 March, city fathers had pushed again for continued enrollment by *ouvriers et ouvrières* in the work registries, reminding citizens that, “we are counting on the patriotism of *tous les citoyens*.”<sup>16</sup> *Ouvrières* saw ads for their labor as embroiderers by half a dozen employers.<sup>17</sup> An *affiche* of 11 March reminded National Guard members, who earned 1 franc 50/day, that they could request leave from their units if they found work; the soldier, however, would be welcomed back on the payroll if his employment ceased.<sup>18</sup> This implied the government understood the necessity of keeping the National Guard serving during the transition into a revived economy. March 13 declared that finally, requisitioned housing would be released after 20 March.<sup>19</sup> Secular schooling for adult women reopened in the II arrondissement and various other districts on 15 March, all meeting from 8-10pm.<sup>20</sup> On 18 March, British humanitarian aid continued deliveries to municipal cantines around the city. Charlotte Ritchie, who assisted in the distribution of these goods, wrote letters from Paris during this month describing her visits to the poor. She noted, “many are dead, many others have survived. . . . almost all the deaths I have heard of took place in February,” highlighting the continued municipal problems, not ending when the siege did.<sup>21</sup> City leaders prioritized getting household economies up and

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<sup>16</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/1352-X (MP-XIV), XIV-15.

<sup>17</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/1352-X (MP-10-XVIII), XVIII-16.

<sup>18</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/1352-X (MP-10-XIX), XIX-36, dated 11 March 1871.

<sup>19</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/1352-X (MP-10-XIX), XIX-38.

<sup>20</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/1352-X (MP-10-II), II-37.

<sup>21</sup> Charlotte Ritchie, *A Memoir* (London: Spottiswoode & Co., 1879), 13.

running without further delay.

Charlotte Ritchie, much known for her charity and associated personal relationships with poor women, wrote of post-siege circumstances. On 13 March, she had talked with a young mother, whose child was among the few infant survivors of the siege. The mother told her that, “She and her baby had slept in the open air 21 nights during the bombardment.” She was now able to find condensed milk at the *mairie* “thanks to the generous English.”<sup>22</sup> As of that date, Ritchie had

heard of about 25 deaths among [acquaintances] I knew, and [had] about ten ill from the effects of the siege. . . . Everyone is very brave, and every woman is a heroine. . . . Several ladies living in the neighbourhood of the *Champs Élysées* who had suffered fearfully all through the winter from want of food and fuel declare they felt more deeply the sound of the Prussian bugles than all their former misery.<sup>23</sup>

Even Ritchie, who feared “Belleville people” as much or more than anything, notes, “The vital questions (sic) . . . for the whole of Paris is that of the Rents. Three quarters will be due next month, and all the money has been spent in food instead of being put aside as usual for payment of rent.”<sup>24</sup> Although not aligning herself with the political and social views of the poor, Ritchie does not appear to have seen the street presence of so many women and children – especially in the aftermath of the siege – as indicative of an intrinsic immorality or incompetence on their part, as did so many reformers associated

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 14-15. The woman Ritchie meets is also grateful because the milk means she can now wean her child. Quite possibly, this allowed the woman to look forward to working further afield, as Malenfant Rouchy had done during the siege. However, as Malenfant Rouchy’s account and the survival of this child also show, broader issue of infants’ health rested on the bodies of women, in particular. What was a wise choice one day, could prove to be a dangerous one later, and visa versa. Citoyennes often made trade-offs between economic necessity and proximity to their young children.

<sup>23</sup> Ritchie, *A Memoir*, 14.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

with the development of the welfare state.<sup>25</sup> She concluded that her greatest concern in this regard was for “the poor old desolate women in their little homes, and we must help ours as much as possible.”<sup>26</sup> Possessive though she appears, as the Commune verged on emergence, even a privileged woman could understand the challenges women and others faced.

Within memoirs and letters, some middle-class women, like Ritchie, grasped the desperate situation of women of the popular classes.<sup>27</sup> In contrast, men of the middle classes most-often showed little understanding of, or empathy for, the women they saw on the streets during events. Women rarely caricatured other women, although they retained gendered representations of Paris, France, and liberty, for example. However, men regularly wrote of women in the singular, used hyperbole, and racialized and sexualized their descriptions of communardes of all stripes.<sup>28</sup> Whether self-identifying as republicans, patriots, anti-clerical, workers, prostitutes, or loving mothers and wives,

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<sup>25</sup> In addition to Rachel G. Fuchs, *Poor and Pregnant in Paris: Strategies for Survival in the Nineteenth Century* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1992) and Elinor A. Accampo, Rachel G. Fuchs, and Mary Lynn Stewart, *Gender and the Politics of Social Reform in France, 1870-1914* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1995), for later Third Republic welfare state, see Timothy B. Smith, *Creating the Welfare State in France, 1880-1940* (Montreal: McGill-Queens Press, 2003) and Paul V. Dutton, *The Origins of the French Welfare State: The Struggle for Social Reform in France, 1914-1947* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Comparatively, in addition to the contemporary work by Charles Loring Brace, *The Dangerous Classes of New York and Twenty Years' Work Among Them* (New York: Wynkoop & Hallenbeck, 1880), see Christine Stansell's, “Women, Children, and the Uses of the Streets: Class and Gender Conflict in New York City, 1850-1860,” *Feminist Studies* 8, No. 2 (Summer 1982): 309-335, and the more complete analysis in *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (New York: Knopf, 1986).

<sup>26</sup> Ritchie, *A Memoir*, 14. The possessive, “ours,” certainly implies a patronizing or maternal view of the poor, but also, responsibility for women in particular.

<sup>27</sup> Analyzing the role of privileged women in the *Sociétés de charité maternelle* over the long nineteenth century, Christine Adams argues that women led “in responding to the particular needs of mothers and children” being “quick to recognize that their indigent sisters needed assistance.” Adams does not analyze the Commune era, although her point remains relevant for some bourgeoisie-associated women during the siege and Commune. See “Maternal Societies in France: Private Charity Before the Welfare State,” *Journal of Women's History* 17 No. 1 (Spring 2005): 87.

<sup>28</sup> This point does not receive consistent attention in this dissertation's analysis, as Gay L. Gullickson's work, *Unruly Women of Paris: Images of the Commune* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1996) addresses these components to a significant degree.

many women interpreted events with a gendered analysis. In doing so, they reflected their own experiences as well as an avid awareness of men's restrictive, gendered logic – and discourse. As March 1871 progressed, middle-class men evinced fears about the political aspirations of male National Guards.

The National Guard, in many ways representing the sentiments of the Parisian popular classes, organized itself with an elected Central Committee on 15 March, fearing precisely the goals of “Thiers and Company.”<sup>29</sup> In describing the Paris Commune, American editor, William Pembroke Fetridge, was not alone in claiming it, “the most formidable and criminal the world has ever seen.”<sup>30</sup> He linked that description with the National Guard elections. Those of the working classes making up the National Guard had gone so far in their “criminal activity” to wish “not only to exercise military but political rights, and insisted on electing their own municipal officers.”<sup>31</sup> The National Guard Central Committee would not be the Commune governing body. However, those most economically affected by the lingering effects of the siege had been doubly wounded by the National Assembly's decision to immediately call in all debts incurred during the war. Therefore, they supported the Central Committee as opposed to the conservative, if nominally republican, National Assembly and Presidency. Additionally, the Presidency's mid-March decision to seize Parisian cannons blatantly disregarded the recent symbolic and material significance of the guns.

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<sup>29</sup> Joseph-André Vignix uses this term regularly in his manuscript although it was not uncommon, especially in caricatures. NWU/ Siege of Paris Collection/Vignix ms. 163, entry dated 28 March 1871.

<sup>30</sup> William Pembroke Fetridge, *The Rise and Fall of the Paris Commune in 1871; with a Full Account of the Bombardment, Capture, and Burning of the City* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1871), 15.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

Victorine Malenfant Rouchy begins her chapter on the beginning of the Commune with late February events. She states, “before the entrance of the Prussians into Paris [on 1 March], *le peuple* had moved the cannons to the Buttes of Montmartre.”<sup>32</sup> Her description links the movement of the cannon to the preceding siege, the coming Revolution, and the significance of *le peuple* traversing the streets of Paris. Parisians’ refusal to let the subscriptioned cannon fall into the hands of the Prussians-now-Germans led them to situate the cannon in relatively safe locations in Paris, with the largest arsenal at the heart of the workers’ arrondissements. During the siege, women had been involved with fund-raising for the cannon, financially contributed directly to their production, and provided labor for their creation. Then, “three days before the Germans entered Paris, the National Guard, with a great number of women and children among them . . . gathered the cannons paid for by Parisians . . . this was the preamble of the Revolution of 18 March.”<sup>33</sup> At the time, the cannon materially symbolized the sacrifice of the women, children, and men of Paris in behalf of their self-exiled Republic and besieged city. As viewed especially by *le peuple* in Montmartre, whose homes and workplaces guarded the cannon’s new residence, no enemy – foreign or domestic – would be allowed to take this significant cache of weaponry. The newly-elected members of the Republic’s Presidency and Assembly had other ideas.<sup>34</sup>

### 18 March 1871

Fear of an armed Paris steered President Thiers’ decision to attempt a removal of

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<sup>32</sup> Brocher, *Souvenirs*, 155.

<sup>33</sup> Jean Allemane, *Mémoires d’un Communard: Des Barricades au Bagne* (Paris: Librairie Socialiste, c. 1880), 6.

<sup>34</sup> Elections had been held on 8 February, with this Assembly meeting for the first time on the 12<sup>th</sup>, then electing Adolphe Thiers as “*Chef du pouvoir exécutif*” on the 17<sup>th</sup>.

the 200 cannon from Montmartre before dawn on 18 March 1871. The fact the military personnel sent to take the cannon demonstrated ineptitude by not bringing enough beasts of burden to complete the job tipped the scales in favor of verbal, but unarmed and initially outnumbered, women.<sup>35</sup> Six thousand soldiers accompanied this military attack, which included situating brigades in other parts of the city where cannons were located.<sup>36</sup> Later, women would heave cannon and *mitrailleuses* through the streets under their own power; initially, however, the steep grades of Montmartre seem to have inhibited the task of lugging the cannon elsewhere without risking the cannon running over the personnel pulling them. This was why, according to Malvina Souville Blanchecotte, the cannon had been moved to the Buttes some days earlier, accompanied by the songs of women, children, and men of *le peuple*.<sup>37</sup> So, when between 4 and 6AM, soldiers still milled about the area, having killed one sentry and imprisoning others, “housewives” surrounded and interrogated them, sounding the alarm.<sup>38</sup> Then, members of the National Guard arrived on the scene.

By 8AM, a huge crowd had gathered; shortly after, General Lecomte three times

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<sup>35</sup> This point is always mentioned as poor judgment, although I have not been able to determine if the lack of animals, including horses, in Paris and elsewhere in the wake of the war and siege contributed to the problem in this case.

<sup>36</sup> Buttes Montmartre held the most weaponry, but cannons had also been moved to Buttes-Chaumont; salle de la Marseillaise, rue de Flandres; La Chapelle; Clichy; Belleville; Ménilmontant; and a few remained at Place des Vosges. Women and others engaged in harassing military personnel ran to those locations following the reveille at the Buttes Montmartre, contributing to the full evacuation of troops from the city later in the day.

<sup>37</sup> Christine Planté, ed. *Tablettes d'une femme pendant la Commune A.-M. (Malvina) Blanchecotte* (Tusson: Du Lérot, 1996[1872]), 11.

<sup>38</sup> For the use of *ménagères*, see, Bernard Noël, *Dictionnaire de la Commune* (Paris: Fernand Hazan, 1971), 130.

gave the order to shoot at the crowd of women, children, and men.<sup>39</sup> The soldiers hesitated, then upended their guns, refusing to follow orders. Women had urged, even began, that fraternization earlier. Members of the crowd took Lecomte prisoner. About eighty gendarmes were also arrested, later taken to the XVIII arrondissement's *mairie*, where a young Georges Clemenceau presided. Larger crowds from the Places Pigalle and Clichy – areas still well-known for their association with prostitution, other forms of women's labor, and the Montmartre districts – now included soldiers openly fraternizing with National Guards, plus women, children and non-military men. A cavalry captain charged the crowd, with others firing in return. Although killing the captain and his horse, this was the only confrontation of its kind during the day. Soon, members of the crowd began raising barricades, others occupying those still existing since the siege. The day was not going according to the plans of either General Vinoy or President Thiers, who ordered a full military evacuation of the city by 3PM.

Lissagaray, a communard and journalist, wrote that the women at the Montmartre Buttes that morning, “did not wait for their men,” as they had been “hardened by the war in which they had a double share of misery.”<sup>40</sup> According to many, on that morning, “women also flocked to the scene and were largely instrumental in prevailing on the soldiers to fraternize with the National Guard.”<sup>41</sup> William Fetridge observed that,

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<sup>39</sup> Paul Lanjalley and Paul Corriez, *Histoire de la Révolution du 18 Mars* (Paris: Librairie Internationale, 1871), 27, for one of many contemporary accounts. Claude Martin Lecomte (1817-1871) fought during the Franco-Prussian War and oversaw what was supposed to be the retrieval of the cannon.

<sup>40</sup> Hippolyte Lissagaray, *Histoire de la Commune de 1871* (Paris: Maspero, 1967[1876]), 110.

<sup>41</sup> This particular version of the observation is from Ernest Alfred Vizitelly, *My Adventures in the Commune: Paris 1871* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1914), 38. English-born Vizitelly (1853-1922) reported from France during events, both for his own publication interests and for his father's publishing

“several cannon which the artillerymen had retaken were abandoned by them near the *mairie* [of the XVIII arrondissement], where the women and children precipitated themselves on the pieces to preserve them.”<sup>42</sup> As Gay Gullickson summarizes, “from two o’clock to six o’clock that morning the struggle for control of the cannons was a male drama [including] soldiers, generals, and a few early-rising guardsmen who were captured . . . after six o’clock, however, women and other civilians became central players in the struggle for the cannons and, ultimately, for control of the city.”<sup>43</sup> Women’s verbal and physical actions transformed a male military conflict by resisting armed interference with “their” cannon, precipitating the Commune.<sup>44</sup>

Describing the color red as being “everywhere, the color of blood,” Malvina Souville Blanchecotte observed ordinary women’s early support for the Commune on 18 March.<sup>45</sup> At the Hôtel de Ville she heard a “lovely young girl of *le peuple*, quiet strongly-built,” who admired the *mitrailleuses* “with enthusiasm.” Demonstrating anti-Versailles sentiments of a *communarde*, this “girl of the people” proclaimed that here there were, “three *mitrailleuses* with 37 holes for 37 bullets at once,” making possible “death 37 times over!”<sup>46</sup> Blanchecotte comments that the young woman “circled [the *mitrailleuse*], quite at home and preached, in these groups, resistance.” This unnamed

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company. He later makes the acquaintance of Emile Zola and became entangled in various “obscenity” charges brought when Zola’s novels, which Vizitelly translated, appeared in English

<sup>42</sup> Fetridge, *The Rise and Fall of the Paris Commune in 1871*, 34.

<sup>43</sup> Gullickson, *Unruly Women of Paris*, 25.

<sup>44</sup> That the Third Republic observed this moment, not elections, as the Commune’s germination, is also clear in the building of Sacré Cœur at this location in an attempt to vindicate the city’s “sins,” acted out in the weeks, and repression, of the Commune. This point is frequently invisible in many descriptions of the basilica’s history.

<sup>45</sup> Blanchecotte, *Tablettes*, 39.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*



communarde, like many others, offered another proposal to *fédérés* (National Guard troops) listening to her. Offering a tactical suggestion, she argued “to have the wives of the *sergents de ville* still in Paris march in front of them [the *mitrailleuses*], then the Versailles army will not fire.”<sup>47</sup> Blanchecotte described this youthful orator as having a “bare head with beautiful blond hair, intelligent and convincing face” with a “big influence on those around her.” The young woman’s influential words praised the weapons of war, their efficiency in killing, and suggested an alternate military tactic – employing the wives of police personnel as human shields. Her allies and enemies were clear to her audience, which Souville Blanchecotte articulated as primarily uniformed males.

Souville Blanchecotte paid particular attention to women’s words and actions during the Commune, noting that some speakers were already familiar to their street audience. Now speaking of another communarde near the Hotel de Ville, Blanchecotte added that she “noticed another of these *camarades oratrices* . . . blond also, decently-attired, serious and distinguished.”<sup>48</sup> Souville Blanchecotte notes that she “had already heard this voice, she spoke with vehemence about the deprivations of the first siege,” recalling “the black bread that she called, ‘*le brouet national*.’” The author linked this woman’s verbal expressions during the siege to her present statements, reporting that this communarde concluded, like the first, “with a call for resistance.”<sup>49</sup> That bad bread represented the full weight of siege deprivations to this person brings the paramount

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 39-40.

importance of gendered food procurement during the siege sharply into view. The siege provided this woman of the popular classes a forum to vent her frustration in that arena, but now the forum offered her more. While her prior orations had gained her an audience, her present street-corner listeners, which included Souville Blanchecotte, *fédérés*, and other observers, heard her agitate for insurrection. Souville Blanchecotte also described men's responses to this woman's words, writing that, "the *fédérés* watched her and admired her, mouths open."<sup>50</sup> Women held the attention of many from the first day of the Commune.

Souville Blanchecotte directly states that women often talked to each other about what women, as a group, were doing during those days.<sup>51</sup> She described the numerous women in the streets around Paris with red insignias on them – already indicative of their Commune alliance prior to any election.<sup>52</sup> This comment exposes a collectivity to some women's actions. Women, therefore, appeared as vocal actors on the first day of the Commune, linking their resistance to their siege experience, sometimes with military materiel to strengthen their point. Red ribbons and other insignia acted as a political show of unity, while Souville Blanchecotte's report demonstrates women paid attention to women's collective actions. Women such as Souville Blanchecotte and male *fédérés* took notice, with a woman including the words of ordinary women in her memoir, demonstrating respect for their street-corner arguments.

Crowds continued to gather, with women playing noticeable roles. The account

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 40-1.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

of infamous communarde, Louise Michel, confirms this image. She wrote that, “all the women were there” and “the women threw themselves on the cannon [and] the *mitrailleuses*.”<sup>53</sup> From 18 March onward, “the women and children were all in the streets,” according to Harper’s magazine contributor, William Fetridge.<sup>54</sup> “At the junction of the Boulevards Voltaire (formerly Pr. Eugene) and Richard Lenoir [XI arrondissement], women and children were at work constructing a barricade.”<sup>55</sup> In his discussion of the Commune as a turning point in history, Robert Tombs later summarized that, “one of the most famous and fateful scenes in French history [18 March]” included women and children as significant agents of that day.<sup>56</sup> Avowed communardes such as Michel, female observers such as Souville Blanchecotte, pro- and anti-Commune male journalists such as Lissagaray and Fetridge, respectively, and later Commune historians such as Tombs concur as to women’s visible, audible, and ubiquitous presence in the crowds of 18 March 1871. Gender and its agents marked the spontaneous eruption of the Commune.

### **18 March – 28 May 1871**

Women household heads such as Charlotte Ritchie, reported the words of servants, whose perspectives are often otherwise invisible. In Ritchie’s case, she displays a female servant’s contact with, and understanding of, political events, as well as her power in the household. Living at 12, rue Lavoisier in the VIII arrondissement, Ritchie commented on 20 March about her cook’s view of the uprising. She proceeds, “Félicie is

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<sup>53</sup> Michel, *La Commune* (Paris: P.-V. Stock, 1898), 164.

<sup>54</sup> Fetridge, *The Rise and Fall of the Paris Commune in 1871*, 40.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Robert Tombs, *The Paris Commune 1871* (London: Longman, 1999), 1.

triumphant, as we shall now see how much better her class is than higher ones, but she bears her honours meekly, and turns round in her politics with each person she meets.”<sup>57</sup>

When Ritchie teased her a bit, asking if they should exchange roles as had been suggested in 1848, Félicie adroitly responded that, “not until [Ritchie has] taken lessons in that art [of cooking] could she trust the ladle-scepter to [her] hands.”<sup>58</sup> The “ladle-scepter” represented Félicie’s power within the woman-only household, but Félicie also served as a conduit to the political world and shared her information, as did other working women.

Edmond Goncourt recorded his gendered conduits for some of his information, divulging another layer of working women’s verbal participation in events. On 18 March, he wrote in his journal, “This morning the bread woman says there is fighting in Montmartre.”<sup>59</sup> In doing so, he reveals the unnamed source of his first awareness of an uprising. He also discloses his current reliance on female sources for ultimately “dependable” information about events. This contrasts with his more common depictions of working women as having gossipy, uncouth, and certainly, uncivilized mouths. Women laboring as domestics or deliverers of domestic needs had intimate access to the homes of members of affluent classes. They also had valuable contacts among workers, as well as familiarity of events taking place in the public arenas of Parisian streets. Even without knowing – or caring to include – the bread woman’s name, her visibility in Goncourt’s account reveals her as a significant channel of information. The oral rumors of “fighting in Montmartre” were true, perhaps elevating her contribution from gendered

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<sup>57</sup> Ritchie, *A Memoir*, 16.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Becker, *Goncourt Journal*, 227.

“rumor” to dependable “testimony” within the oral information circuits of Paris.<sup>60</sup>

Working women such as Félicie and the bread woman played a vital role in events, especially at moments when servants’ expertise in public space and communication routes became more important.

Oral transmissions can also be wrong, or at least incomplete, but often still allow a glimpse of the complexity of their routes. Whether or not working women lived or worked in Montmartre, they had their networks of oral information. The Republic had encouraged and relied on these networks during the siege, indicated by calls to turn in those who hoarded food, for example. However, the coming weeks would heighten suspicions against these same oral networks, now that Parisians were not all on the side of the Republic. At the end of the day on 18 March, Mme Talbot, residing in the IX arrondissement near the future communarde club at La Madeleine, wrote to Mme Delaroche-Vernet. She recited that her charcoal seller had told her cook [who had told Mme Talbot] that, “the worst of . . . *la grande affaire de Montmartre* . . . is over.”<sup>61</sup> Although in many ways, the charcoal seller was mistaken, the day itself ended fairly quietly, with the cannons still in the hands of Parisians. Where the charcoal seller got his information is unclear, as is how many other women learned of the summation of that day’s *grande affaire* via his words. This game of telephone nonetheless had at least three transmittal points – all including women – though likely more, given the number of domestics a charcoal seller could see in a day. Evidently Ritchie’s cook/nursemaid,

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<sup>60</sup> See Julia A. Clancy-Smith’s, *Rebel and Saint: Muslim Notables, Populist Protest, Colonial Encounters (Algeria and Tunisia, 1800-1904)* (Berkeley: University of California, 1994) for the relevance of analyzing “oral information circuits” for understanding developments on the local level within the Islamic ecumene, and for world history more broadly.

<sup>61</sup> Delaroche-Vernet, *Une Famille pendant la Guerre et la Commune*, 195-6.

Goncourt's bread woman, and Talbot's cook did not write their memoirs as their employers did, but their verbal contributions influenced memories and written accounts of authors aligned with both sexes.

William Fetridge claimed that, "the women of the neighborhood were loud in their denunciations against any National Guards who had surrendered [to Versailles troops], declaring, if they [the women] had been left in charge, the *canaille* of Versailles would have met with some [tougher] resistance."<sup>62</sup> This moment corresponds to a moment at the end of Commune on the Place Pigalle, when Nathalie Duval Lemel told the National Guardsmen on that barricade that they were "slackers" and if they would not defend the barricades well, the women would – and eventually did.<sup>63</sup> These moments bookend the weeks of the Commune and demonstrate that at least some women spoke capably and aggressively, not only as *le peuple* against its government or military authority, but as women against male authority and at times, specifically the male ineptitude of their comrades.

At other times on 18 March, women verbally and ferociously evinced despise for soldiers from Versailles. Their assertive condemnations gained them the moniker, "viragos." According to Fetridge, "one immense virago was gesticulating in a most fearful manner, calling the regular officers of the line scoundrels, assassins, and dogs."<sup>64</sup> Whether she was actually "immense" or appeared larger-than-life, given the verbiage accompanying her physical expressions, is unclear. What is clear is that she stood out, at

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<sup>62</sup> Fetridge, *The Rise and Fall of the Paris Commune in 1871*, 29.

<sup>63</sup> AHG/Ly23/4e conseil/688, dossier Duval Lemel, "Process Verbal."

<sup>64</sup> Fetridge, *The Rise and Fall of the Paris Commune in 1871*, 30.

least partially due to her words aimed at Versailles troops. Although virago has its roots in references to women of strength, by the nineteenth century it had become an unequivocal gendered epithet, synonymous with both the (real or imagined) volume and tenor of a woman's voice. As Fetridge's account indicates, use of the term sprinkles descriptions of women in the streets of Paris during the Commune, especially in regard to their angry denunciations. This point indicates that women's voices drew increased attention, whether or not characterizations were precise. Women appear vividly, as well as verbally, in accounts of crowds.

Police observation of women's presence in those crowds containing otherwise unnumbered, unnamed, and sometimes, ungendered members, requires comment. Within police archival files, a sketch depicts women, children, and men among the 18 March crowd, with at least one woman pushing the wheel of a cannon.<sup>65</sup> Other women look on, as, for the moment, the Tricolor flutters in the distance. Other records collectively indicate that when police agents referred to *la foule*, the reference generally included women, unless specifically mentioned otherwise.<sup>66</sup> Individual police personnel – sometimes members of the *service des mœurs* – reported women's sometimes dominant collective presence in events. They also indicate a particular focus on changes 18 March brought to public gatherings of women perceived to be sex workers. One police spy reported, "Very few [prostitutes] are [any longer] in establishments frequented by [military personnel]."<sup>67</sup> Apparently, police experience in observing the habits of women

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<sup>65</sup> APP/Ba 364-3/pf1.

<sup>66</sup> APP/Ba 364-3pf2.

<sup>67</sup> APP/Ba364-3/pf1

in the streets – including prostitutes – lent itself to keeping them in view more generally. Quite early in the Commune, at least one police spy reported his surprise that prostitutes seemed to have evacuated their usual public locations. The same observer described seeing women he associated with prostitution in other settings – though not plying their trade.<sup>68</sup> Members of the *service des mœurs*, while demonstrating more than an average interest in the gendered makeup of the “crowd” of the popular classes, also reveal that 18 March brought significant changes to the public lives of women they routinely observed.

Carefully deconstructing observations of crowds discloses the gendered components of those groups. Goncourt’s account of 5 May supports other evidence regarding some women’s responses to reactionaries like Goncourt, as well as men defaulting from National Guard military service. He records that, while observing a crowd, “after someone say[s], ‘we want no more rich people!’ . . . a woman comes to the front of the group . . . and says, ‘The cowards! Men who look on while others fight! I’d just like to get my hands on a reactionary, on a royalist, I’d claw his face for him!’”<sup>69</sup> This moment corresponds to Joséphine Mimet Bernard’s testimony that she had expressed her frustration that “it was not fair that her lover had to march when others did not.”<sup>70</sup> Though never named, the woman from the crowd inverted gender roles associated with physical violence, asserting herself angrily by moving forward to face the

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<sup>68</sup> APP/Ba364-3/pf1, dated 25 Mars 1871.

<sup>69</sup> Becker, *From the Goncourt Journal*, 279. The second ellipse contains the phrase about the woman, “her paws in the air making wild gestures,” and afterward her words, “she probes the crowd with an eye avid for the guillotine, then draws aware, staggering in a sort of drunken anger.” Although certainly potential for distortion exists in the part included for analysis, the words of the women provide a different level of accuracy than Goncourt’s added description.

<sup>70</sup> AN/BB24/746/Demand en Grâce de Bernard (Joséphine) née Mimet, 26 conseil de guerre. Mimet Bernard denies other acts of which she is accused, but not her sentiment or statement.



crowd and expressing her views of (feminized?) males unwilling to fight. Mimet Bernard offers herself as a witness to the viewpoint expressed by anonymous women of the crowd.

While Goncourt does not reveal the location of the threat, his voyeuristic wanderings also do not limit the scope of his observations to a traditionally working class local. By 9 May, Goncourt reports, as do newspapers, that National Guard troops are everywhere, preparing to depart the city. His journal describes the crowd at the Place de la Concord gathered on that day. It included “canteen women in full costume; hospital nurses with bedding on their backs and bags of dressings at their waists . . . on the Place Louis XV.”<sup>71</sup> Evidently refusing to acknowledge the Square’s revolutionary name change, Goncourt described women’s visible revolutionary support for the civil war effort. Communardes supplied their uncensored opinions, enforcement of Commune standards against men not doing their gendered duty, and military service for their Commune Republic. Men – as Goncourt’s account demonstrates – paid attention to them. Police also took careful notes on women.

Police considered women to have had leading roles on 18 March, although a full accounting of the actions of particular women is not yet complete. Soon, Generals Clément-Thomas and Lecomte lay dead among the crowd, upping the ante for both Thiers and communardes.<sup>72</sup> Police reports for that day identify women’s names on arrest warrants issued regarding the “*Affaire Clément-Thomas et Lecomte*” – warrants not

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 285.

<sup>72</sup> Clément Thomas (1809-1871) had participated in the repression of the 1848 June Days.

pursued until after the Commune.<sup>73</sup> The names of Marie Bonnard and Françoise Dagas appear along with their warrant numbers, in between some of that day's police *rappports* from various arrondissements, as well as the list of belongings found on the bodies of the generals. Bonnard was not arrested until October, as the day's upheavals rescinded police authority, relegating it to an impotent status; however, looking forward to a more virile future, police kept records on those women they perceived as participants.<sup>74</sup> Working women occupied public space and the police record.

The secret police, now representing Versailles' "bonapartists," paid attention to women's oral condemnations of wives of police, later using the information against them. In one account, the police report on Melanie Jacques, *femme* Gauthier indicates that a *gardien de la paix*, Monsieur Zehr, had not been able to rejoin his company due to the uprising, and had hid himself on 18 March.<sup>75</sup> He was taken in by a friend on rue de l'Echiquier in the X arrondissement. His wife, evidently visiting that location from time to time, became the subject of surveillance by agents of the Commune, including Melanie Jacques Gauthier. Eventually, by the middle of May and having observed Mme Zehr for some time, Jacques Gauthier verbally denounced her, resulting in Zehr's imprisonment at the headquarters of Commune police. According to Zehr and other witnesses, the communarde confronted Zehr on about 14 May, saying to the gathering crowd, "She's a *bouche inutile*, a wife of a *sergent de ville*, it's necessary to shoot her!" The Commune's police commissioner, responding directly to her accusation, agreed. Showing no

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<sup>73</sup> APP/Ba 364-3/pf1: "Commune de Paris du Samedi 18 mars au Mardi 21 mars 1871."

<sup>74</sup> APP/Ba 364-3/pf1. Bonnard was arrested sometime before 12 October 1871, though I have not yet found further reference to Dagas.

<sup>75</sup> AN/BB24/(#3375. S. 72), Demande en Grâce for Femme Gautier/Gauthier née (Mélanie) Jacques, 11 June 1872 letter, reporting to Clemency Commission.

gendered sympathy the commissioner announced, “This is a woman who should be taken away, as she has an assassin’s face!”<sup>76</sup> Zehr escaped her imprisonment during the confusion surrounding the Préfecture fire a few days later, accusing Jacques Gauthier in the Commune’s aftermath.

According to Jacques Gauthier’s recorded statement, she did not admit to threats of death, but she defended her actions in legal terms, as problematic as that was. Her clemency letter reads, “Taking the government of the Commune for a legal government, [I] believed denouncing *la femme* Zehr was an act of patriotism.”<sup>77</sup> Jacques Gauthier’s testimony was certainly constrained within a discursive attempt to gain her freedom or at least reduce her sentence. However, her self-proclaimed reasons indicate her view of the Commune’s legitimacy, as well as her role as a patriotic citizen within it. Given she was writing these particular lines over a year after her participation and her audience saw nothing legitimate about the Commune, she could hope for no sympathy for her point of logic. Intriguingly, only men held official police power during the Commune, yet Jacques Gauthier faced accusation of “the arrest of Mme Zehr,” something her interrogation, trial record, and clemency appeal do not address.<sup>78</sup>

The merging of a police commissioner’s “official” actions and Jacques Gauthier’s “unofficial” ones saw no boundary in this case, neither for her accusers nor, evidently, for herself. That her accusers saw nothing legitimate about the Commune’s government meant that a woman’s “unofficial” actions could not shield her from prosecution: all

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

actions occurred under the rubric of illegitimate. Under these circumstances, women were as guilty as the Commune's elected and appointed officials, as those early prisoner requests confirm. To some degree, this merging of women-unofficial-private with men-official-public demonstrates women's participation in Commune-generated "publics." It also shows how their equal claim to those publics could no longer shield them in previously gendered ways. The rare exception to the phrasing of a *communarde's* "illegal arrest" of a woman presented itself in a case where the report notes that Virginie Pasteau, *Veuve Corbion* "provoked the arrest of *femme* Demoulins for initiating meetings sympathetic to the *Versillais* [cause]."<sup>79</sup> However, little if any substantive difference appears to have existed between this "provocation" and Jacques Gauthier's "arrest." Jacques Gauthier did not deny the denunciation either at her trial or in later appeals for clemency, though her presentation of words and reasoning differed from police and witness reports. Part of the penalty for these words of this fifty-year-old would be ten years of hard labor followed by a lifetime of surveillance by the police.

The words of another *communarde*, Marie Jeanne Bouquet, *femme* Lucas, resonated with those of other women regarding the wives of *sergents de ville*. During the early days of May, Bouquet Lucas – married and without children during the Commune – demonstrated her resentment towards nuns, priests, and the police and their wives. According to witnesses, near her residence on rue St-Gilles in the III arrondissement she said, "The wives of police spies and of the gendarmes will be in front of the cannon along with their children," aligning her analysis with the blond *oratrice* Souville Blanchecotte

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<sup>79</sup> AN/BB24/746, Demande en Grâce de Pasteau (Virginie) *Veuve Corbion*; rapport de 17 Juillet 1872.

heard early in the Commune.<sup>80</sup> She suggested the priests and nuns were at least as guilty, especially since they did not work and must therefore be supported by the labors of others, echoing Sieyès' argument of an earlier Revolution. The names of witnesses who supposedly heard her utterances here, at club meetings at St-Nicolas des Champs in the IV arrondissement, and at a barricade, also in the IV, are invisible in the records, leaving what might otherwise appropriately be considered hearsay, to remain as veritable "fact." In her case, she had previously left her husband, thereby increasing her "guilt" as far as police were concerned. In a letter attempting to aid her appeal in 1872, her sister reminded the commission that, "leaving her husband is not a crime." Her appeal was rejected, however, leaving the fifty-two-year-old to her prescribed sentence of twenty years of hard labor. Police associated women's verbal attacks on the wives of police with moral deviance, witnessed by their marital relationship among other things. Newly-established political clubs provided another venue for Jacques Gauthier and her peers to verbally deviate from polite support for menfolk and other authorities.

Underrepresented in the historical record of this revolution, women's club presence and rhetoric deserve further attention. Generally loosely organized and often come-one-come-all public venues, clubs by their nature did not create the records that other forums did. Clubs lay more in the realm of oral history in many ways, therefore rendering them less accessible in terms of their value for historians, especially since no participants now remain alive. Individual sources mentioning them consequently also fall into the realm of suspect. This view has reduced the role of ordinary women's voices in

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<sup>80</sup> AN/BB24/746, Demande en Grâce for Lucas (Marie Jeanne) Bouquet.

constructing the Commune's history. Carolyn Eichner's valuable chapter on clubs primarily analyzes Paule Mink's club rhetoric and activities in terms of the development of Mink's "bottom-up, action-over-organization" and "rhetorically violent" feminist socialism.<sup>81</sup> No numbers-based analysis is possible, but combined, newspaper reports, memoir mentions, Paul Fontoulieu's account, police and trial records, as well as representations – all employed here – point to the collective presence of thousands of women attending clubs over the weeks of the Commune. Clubs did not provide the location for all of women's orations, but they played a crucial role in providing a space, now legitimized, for women's expressions of their revolutionary goals, even if those goals were not accomplished or appeared foolish to contemporary observers or later historians. Clubs provided a political space for ordinary, often anonymous, women.

While municipal clubs had been outlawed after 22 January 1871, *clubs rouges* immediately reestablished a presence with the Commune and now met in requisitioned churches around Paris, rather than the municipal buildings of the siege.<sup>82</sup> Commune government seizure of churches – begun only four days after its election – effectively created new municipal buildings, with fifty-one requisitions occurring between 30 March

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<sup>81</sup> *Surmounting the Barricades*, 130.

<sup>82</sup> For their longer history, Claire G. Moses, *French Feminism in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*. For the first Revolution, see Darline Gay Levy, Harriet Branson Applewhite, and Mary Durham, eds. and trans, *Women in Revolutionary Paris 1789-1795* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979). For 1848, Bonnie S. Anderson, "The Lid Comes Off: International Radical Feminism and the Revolutions of 1848," *National Women's Studies Association Journal* 10, No. 2 (Spring 1998): 1-12. Alain Dalotel's, "Les femmes dans les clubs rouges 1870-1871," *Femmes dans la cité 1815-1871*, Alain Corbin, Jacqueline Laloutte, and Michèle Riot-Sarcey, eds. (Grâne: Editions Créaphis, 1997) briefly surveys the siege, and for the Commune, Eichner, *Surmounting the Barricades*, especially Chapter 5, "Paule Mink and the *Clubistes*. For an earlier, but suggestive account, see, Baron Marc de Villiers, *Histoire des Clubs de Femmes et des Légions d'Amazones 1793-1848-1871* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1910).

and 24 May.<sup>83</sup> Within these public forums, women openly discussed and debated with men, as well as instituted single-sex clubs. For this chapter assessing verbal participation, paying attention to location reveals that Paul Fontoulieu's record of clubs and women's testimony exposes women's significant prominence in at least twenty-seven of the fifty-one formal political clubs meeting in churches, with five others indicating women's attendance.<sup>84</sup> Not noted previously, women's club presence appears especially concentrated in arrondissements I, II, III, IV, VIII, XI, and XII, with significant participation also in the XIV, implying a prominent occupation of terrain less-associated with the working classes.

Certainly women of the popular classes occupied these arrondissements for many reasons, but women's Commune prominence outside the northeastern *quartiers* remains underanalyzed. Club women's geographical concentration may be due to the particular – sometimes, symbolic – choices the Commune's official government apparently made in selecting churches to be officially requisitioned. As one example, the early transfer of the I arrondissement's St-Eustache from church to "*Temple de la Raison*" during the first Revolution had its parallel during the Commune.<sup>85</sup> Still, women's presence signifies their willingness to attend weekday late-afternoon and evening meetings at these

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<sup>83</sup> Paul Fontoulieu's account also briefly mentions six other churches, which, "although visited by *fédérés*, [suffered] relatively insignificant losses," generally due only to later bombardment from the buttes Chaumont. Thirteen others are listed as "not bothered during the Commune nor damaged during street fighting." Fontoulieu, *Les Églises de Paris sous la Commune* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1873), 395-398.

<sup>84</sup> Fontoulieu, while discussing the taking of Notre-Dame on 7 April 1871, states, "This was the start of the Terror" – though does not explicitly mention women. As no other sources mention women's presence at Notre-Dame, I did not include it in my tally. However, he does state that on 26 May, "the *incendiaires* tried to burn the old basilica," intriguingly not delineating the sex of the arsonists. Fontoulieu, *Les Églises de Paris sous la Commune*, 19-23.

<sup>85</sup> St-Eustache was requisitioned on 6 April, with women's former and current occupation of its club noted by Fontoulieu. *Les Églises de Paris sous la Commune*, 9-10.

locations, whether convenient to their work, residences, or neither. Some women attended more than one location. In at least three cases, it appears women's occupation of a church preceded official seizure; in at least two of those cases, women of the neighborhood resisted the rituals of official seizure, but evidently not prior unofficial occupation by women.<sup>86</sup> Possibly the seizure of certain churches – such as Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois in the I arrondissement where the *Union des femmes* was formally established – indicates an attempt to utilize more central locations, gathering women from many arrondissements. Also likely however, given the views expressed at pulpits, the preponderance of women at these venues indicates a concerted effort to claim more-bourgeois landscapes as their own.

While Fontoulieu expresses shock that Belleville communardes – “the first to cry, “Down with the priests!” – “almost didn’t touch [their] own church[es],” it is not surprising when understood within a broader geographical analysis of women’s church occupation.<sup>87</sup> The walls of churches in the XVIII, XIX, and XX arrondissements certainly resounded with women’s virulent words, but appear to have served primarily as sites for ateliers, schools, food distributions, and other uses – uses that especially aided local residents. The XVIII arrondissement’s Saint-Pierre de Montmartre, for example, served as an atelier, soup kitchen for workers, and school for girls from the time it opened on 10 April. Women’s club meetings did not occur until the beginning of May. Even so, some churches in these arrondissements saw violence during the last, desperate defense

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<sup>86</sup> The rituals involved in closing a church, re-creating it into a public forum, are described by Fontoulieu only for the first church seized, Saint-Geneviève du Panthéon, on 30 March 1871.

<sup>87</sup> Fontoulieu, *Les Églises de Paris sous la Commune*, 370.



of the Commune, including Saint-Jean-Baptiste in Belleville, sparking Fontoulieu's comment.

Overall, clubs met in at least eighteen of the twenty arrondissements of Paris, evidently excluding the VII and XVI. However, noting locations of women's meetings indicates women-dominated venues in both remaining arrondissements.<sup>88</sup> The VII also saw the comings and goings of Victorine Malenfant Rouchy, living on rue de Beaune. These points imply that women's collective presence – and their words – infiltrated the entire geography of the city. The Commune erupted in Montmartre and ended at Père Lachaise cemetery, with the final barricade falling in Belleville – all areas associated with the working classes at the time. However, noticing the breadth of women's geographical presence during the Commune exposes that the entire city saw the active engagement of many ordinary women in an attempt to create radical change, with their presence coming to represent club activities more broadly

In a series of drawings by a young artist, Bertall, entitled, *Types de la Commune*, a female orator appears over the title, “*Le Club à l'Eglise*.” (Figure 3.1)<sup>89</sup> The representational singular church club incorporates many women within. As this artist demonstrates, all clubs became associated with female speakers, although male participation remained a significant, generally majority, component overall. This same

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<sup>88</sup> Club information, public announcements, and extant *Union des femmes* records support this assessment, though the *Union* claimed committees in all arrondissements. *Union des femmes* meetings of the VII arrondissement were held at the *mairie*. At least one women's club, the “Club des citoyennes de Passy,” met in the XVI arrondissement, with Marc de Villiers noting some events in, *Histoire des clubs*, 402.

<sup>89</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/Caricature Folder 2: Bertall, “Types de la Commune”/Le Club à l'église. Bertall later worked for monarchist newspapers and appears to have experienced no negative fall-out in the wake of the Commune, implying his non-Commune affiliation, though his personal opinions are less clear. Reshef, *Guerre, Mythes et Caricature*, 140.

artist drew a male carrying books and pamphlets under his arm, as representative of the “*Orateur de Boulevard*” who spoke in the streets of revolution. (Figure 3.2)<sup>90</sup> Bertall drew a female figure representing the revolutionary oratory of the church-occupied Red Clubs. For Bertall and his audience, male orators connoted the chaos of the Commune’s streets, yet in fairly conventional ways. Men speaking in the streets, carrying arms, or acting drunk and disorderly did not violate class expectations or gender norms. Female orators offered a greater threat.

Female oration in churches was distinctly associated with the generalized chaos of inverted gender structures – and indicated women’s seizure of masculine sacred *and* republican space. In the “*Club à l’Eglise*” rendition, the audience includes men and women. They appear agitated as they press near the podium at which the woman stands, holding a gun in one hand and extending the other hand into the air, fingers outstretched. Her clothing is that of females, and the depiction of her shoes reveals her “lower” class status, even if her actions did not. The Sacred Heart, sketched onto the rostrum, pales below the dark image of the gesturing woman. In this public venue, the orator is seizing a citizen’s right in a republic: to speak freely. The church podium is high enough so that she figures above the heads of her audience. Here, a woman stands above everyone gathered and the symbol of God virtually trembles beneath her. Her position symbolically and in practice inverts church hierarchy. Images of that “typical” street orator and another depicting the arrest of a priest reveal that the same artist saw these as male arenas. Within the artwork, women’s actual roles in street oration and arrests of

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<sup>90</sup> NWU/Siege and Commune Collection/Folder 2: Bertall, “Types de la Commune”/Orateur de Boulevard.

priests are invisible. While representational in this case, Bertall drew his figures without exaggerated features, depicted similar events to those written about and drawn by others, and included a substantial diversity of human subjects within his drawings. These all indicate a certain realism. The woman at the podium or the man handing out flyers in the street could have been real individuals, though Bertall's intent was not to create a personal portrait. In any event and whatever his perception of the realities of club life, Bertall's distinct association of women with political clubs indicates his understanding – and likely his audience's – that communardes had seized and inverted masculine space. Another image offers a similar theme.

As represented by caricature artist, Léonce Schérer, women composed the exclusive majority attending and participating in some clubs. In an image entitled, "The Women's Club," a less-than-bourgeois woman holds a dog and carries a basket on her back. She leans from the pulpit of a church, gesturing angrily towards the only male in the picture – a pipe-smoking, at-ease National Guardsman.<sup>91</sup> This image appears in a larger grouping titled, *Souvenirs de la Commune*, in which women figure prominently.<sup>92</sup> The title of the drawing, "The Women's Club," implies the artist's understanding that at least one club was women-only – or at least women were in charge.<sup>93</sup> While not

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<sup>91</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/Caricature Album/Schérer/17. Léonce Schérer's work is not numerically prominent among the caricaturists associated with Commune-era work. His work only seems to have appeared in a grouping titled, *Souvenirs de la Commune* (Paris: Deforet & César, 1871), now found at NWU/Siege and Commune of Paris/Schérer/Souvenirs de la Commune. I have been unable to find further information on him and Reshef's, *Guerre, Mythes et Caricature* does not mention him.

<sup>92</sup> Of the 30 illustrations, 17 include women. Women variously exhort National Guard troops, appear as prostitutes, participate in a wedding, complain about their husbands, raise pavés on the barricades, and bring their many children to schools. In one case, Schérer depicts a National Guard uncovering another disguised in woman's attire to avoid service.

<sup>93</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/Caricature Album/Schérer/17.

essentially complimentary of the women he depicts, within the series Schérer seems to reserve his agitation for the Commune's men, whom the women have to exhort to do their duty. In this particular depiction, an animated crowd of women of all ages surrounds the central orator and a *cantinière* holds her small barrel of refreshment as she casually reclines in a chair beneath the rostrum. Another woman with her back to the viewer appears in more affluent attire.

This scene may not depict exact words and actions at a club, though the fact the words are reported suggests Schérer felt them important in understanding the image. The caption indicates that the speaker calls out, "*Citoyennes*, men are scoundrels; mine makes me die of a broken heart and still he isn't hung on the gallows. *Citoyennes*, death to all men!" The communarde crowd responds, "Yes, yes, bravo! Bravo!" after which the speaker in a fit of communarde patriotism exclaims, "I offer mine in sacrifice for the country; you'll all do the same." In fervent agreement the crowd of women shout, "Yes! Yes!" The drawing represents certain concerns of the artist – concerns he particularly associates with the weeks of the Commune, given the title of the collection.

Additionally, the fact a National Guardsman is present hints at the acquiescence of communards to such inversions of roles, making them subject to further criticism for aiding the world turned upside down. That is, even when men were present, many perceived women as (inappropriately) dominating them. Women's association with these public forums was prominent. Other sources validate the perspectives of artists Schérer and Bertall.

In his assessment of clubs, a self-proclaimed communard mirrored the

significance assigned Commune-era clubs and the role of women in them. Georges Jeanneret noted that, “public life basically expressed itself in its clubs,” that the clubs were “where the Commune was the most lively interpreted, and [even] called into question.”<sup>94</sup> After summarizing the clubs in terms of their important role in formulating and responding to events, Jeanneret notes that, “ordinarily, [these] clubs were held in the churches,” with the “curé’s *chaire* serving as the tribune for the orators of the Revolution,” who were not Danton or Marat, but rather, “*le citoyen tout le monde*.”<sup>95</sup> Clearly universalizing *le citoyen*, he also wrote that, “the women also had their clubs and they were not any less ardent.”<sup>96</sup> Jeanneret concurs with communard, Benoit Malon, that, “under the pressure of current circumstances, through the diffusion of socialist ideas, [and] the propaganda of the clubs, *elles* felt that the contributions of women [were] indispensable to the triumph of the social revolution.”<sup>97</sup> Describing women as the “last of the oppressed from the old order,” Jeanneret enthusiastically describes them in the clubs and in the Commune as playing “a passionate role in the proletarian revolution of ‘71.”<sup>98</sup> Bertall, a caricature artist who later aligned with monarchist newspapers, and Jeanneret and Malon, devout communards, saw women as central to the club experience. In the case of the communards, they concurred with women’s own assessment of their centrality in the revolution more broadly. That communards might quote and follow communarde reasoning, rather than only the other way around, has remained little-considered by historians. Another keen observer of clubs was Abbé Paul Fontoulieu.

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<sup>94</sup> Georges Jeanneret, *Paris pendant la Commune Révolutionnaire de 71* (Neuchâtel, 1871), 136.

<sup>95</sup> Jeanneret, *Paris pendant la Commune révolutionnaire de 71*, 137.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 139-40. Malon became the political and romantic partner of André Léo.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 140.

Paying strict attention to clubs and women occupying them, Fontoulieu was not a fan, but offers a detailed perspective of these anti-clerical venues.<sup>99</sup> Requisitioned churches served not only as clubs, but ambulances, ateliers, barracks, schools, cantines, ammunition dumps, and the source of economic support when valuables were seized.<sup>100</sup> Sometimes, in theory, that economic support was to be diverted directly to women's work via the Commune's governing body.<sup>101</sup> Entry was generally free, although fees of 5-25 centimes were sometimes charged to pay for heat and lighting.<sup>102</sup> Although anti-clericalism was a common denominator among ardent communardes, women-occupied clubs offered especially intense critique of the Church and its personnel.<sup>103</sup> The governing body of the Commune did not represent clubists' views – male or female – generally resisting the “bottom-up, oratorically fierce *clubiste* politics.”<sup>104</sup> Louise Michel, seeing politics as theatre, described the clubs as a stage.<sup>105</sup> This stage saw the appearance of many ordinary women, however, indicating the variety of sources referencing club venues deserves attention for moments when they appeared. For

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<sup>99</sup> Carolyn Eichner assesses Abbé Fontoulieu's work as, “highly detailed and rather reliable,” with Gay Gullickson describing it as, “the most extensive source of information about the political clubs.” Eichner, *Surmounting the Barricades*, 285; Gullickson, *Unruly Women*, 109.

<sup>100</sup> As early as 6 April, Fontoulieu indicates the overlap of many of these activities in l'Église de l'assomption.

<sup>101</sup> For one example, see the Commune's discussion of diverting revenue from Mont-de-Piété to women's ateliers in Georges Bourgin and Gabriel Henriot, eds., *Procès-verbaux de la Commune de 1871*, Tome II (Mai 1871) (Paris: Imprimerie A. Lahure, 1945), 228-231.

<sup>102</sup> The weather of March-May 1871 was regularly noted as especially nice, offering club participants and observers a decidedly different atmosphere from that of the winter of 1870-71. At that time, cold, darkness, and hunger dominated, eventually reducing attendance in many areas and prematurely closing many siege-era clubs even before the national government's formal cease-and-desist order of 22 January.

<sup>103</sup> Although not analyzed in this dissertation, since republicans will consistently use the argument that women should not vote given their undue loyalty to the priesthood, siege-era and communard anticlericalism (and the Republic's response to it) at the founding of the Third Republic bears more attention than it has received.

<sup>104</sup> Eichner, *Surmounting the Barricades*, 252.

<sup>105</sup> Michel, *Memoirs*, 201.

Fontoulieu, the bond between events and clubs of the siege, and those of the Commune, was tight.

Linking his present analysis to that of the siege, Fontoulieu argues that the twenty to thirty clubs of the siege called for the suppression of the churches. During the Commune, the number of club venues virtually doubled that of the siege, indicating their prevalence as free speech forums, as well as their official sanction by the Commune's elected government. Fontoulieu's book details the invasion of churches during the Commune as due to "the hate that began in the public meetings under the empire and the clubs after 4 September, which was born in the heart of the masses against the clergy."<sup>106</sup> As such, on 14 December 1870, members of the club de l'Élysée-Montmartre suggested that, "the churches . . . have been built with the money of the *le peuple*. Let's help ourselves to the churches."<sup>107</sup> Fontoulieu goes further back in time, linking the taking of Saint-Eustache on 6 April 1871 with 1793 events. In particular, he points out that this club had been a women's club, led by an actress, Lacombe, who was wounded in fighting on 10 August, and who had presided with a red Phrygian bonnet on her head.<sup>108</sup> For this male observer and police, women's involvement in clubs was an obvious link to the past, as well as an omen of the future.

The military government brought to trial Sophie, *dite* Poirier for trying to change the government through her club exhortations, among other deeds. According to her accusers, she had encouraged citizens to arm themselves against other citizens and had

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<sup>106</sup> Fontoulieu, *Les Églises de Paris sous la Commune*, xi.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., xxii. He follows this with other examples.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

organized and directed an association of more than twenty people, gathering daily, exhorting criminal activities.<sup>109</sup> For police interrogating her, verbal expressions in clubs underlay each count. Poirier admitted to taking part in the Club de la Boule Noire during the siege in order to assist unemployed women, and on at least a few occasions, presided at it; at other times, she had spoken.<sup>110</sup> During the Commune, she claimed a continued interest in increasing employment for women. She testified that, given this interest, she visited clubs, attending eleven public meetings so that she could communicate relevant information to the women there.<sup>111</sup> In particular, she stated that during the siege, the lay ateliers had been designated a sum of 100,000 francs from the Government of National Defense, to be divided among all the people who had taken part in the *associations ouvrières*. She disassociated herself from the agent's current interests in her by saying that during the siege and the Commune, she "never, under any circumstances participated in politics." The link, for the police, was the fact that her service in both timeframes was associated with the XVII arrondissement's Vigilance Committee. Her "animated revolutionary ideas," which she brought forth in clubs, had brought her to the attention of the police authorities during the siege, and later, during the Commune. Her behavior could be accommodated during the siege, especially since her work was funded by the National Government. However, after the Commune, she was to pay for her past and

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<sup>109</sup> AHG/Ly23/4<sup>th</sup> Conseil de Guerre/101, Lemarchand (Doctrinal Poirier), dated 15 February 1872. See also, Eichner, *Surmounting the Barricades*, 111-113, 149.

<sup>110</sup> AHG/Ly23/4<sup>th</sup> Conseil de Guerre/101, Lemarchand (Doctrinal, Poirier), 12 July responses by Doctrinal, to the search of her home.

<sup>111</sup> AHG/Ly23/4<sup>th</sup> Conseil de Guerre/101, Lemarchand (Doctrinal, Poirier), Procès Verbal, 5 December 1871.



present revolutionary “sins.” Forty-one-year-old Poirier would not be alone in paying that penalty.

Military courts sentenced Marie Jeanne Bouquet Lucas, a siege and Commune *ambulancière*, to twenty years of forced labor, partially for her verbal incitement of civil war. Bouquet Lucas attended Commune club meetings at the IV arrondissement’s Saint-Nicolas des Champs, rue Saint-Martin, although she denied personally speaking in them.<sup>112</sup> Proclaimed by police as a “leader of the pack” and “a dangerous woman capable of anything,” Bouquet Lucas formed the ambulance brigade during the siege at the request of military leaders at Créteil. Her sister admitted that Bouquet Lucas had remained in the ambulances during the Commune.<sup>113</sup> The police focused less on her medical aid than her club orations, however. They claimed she was seated near the President at St-Nicolas des Champs and at the moment of the vote to put the archbishop to death during the last week of May, had raised her hand and cried, “Yes, yes, death to the archbishop.” They also noted she had been a prostitute from the age of sixteen and although later married, had eventually left her husband, living in concubinage, “sometimes with one, sometimes with another.”<sup>114</sup> Military courts convicted her for having verbally incited civil war, being complicit in an assassination by her exhortations and threats, and complicity in the fires of Paris, based in her verbal threats and instructions.<sup>115</sup> No witnesses claimed she had taken up arms in a civil war, that her

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<sup>112</sup> AN/BB24/746 Lucas (Marie Jeanne) Bouquet, Demande en Grâce in letter she wrote for clemency, dated 5 July 1874. She died in prison 16 March 1876.

<sup>113</sup> AN/BB24/746 Lucas Demande en Grâce, Letter from Veuve Gorrand.

<sup>114</sup> AN/BB24/746 Lucas (Marie Jeanne) Bouquet, Demande en Grâce, 26 Juillet 1872 Rapport to Clemency Commission.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

ambulance service was treasonous, or that she killed the archbishop or actually set fires; her crimes stemmed from her words. For the police and their witnesses, a woman's club appearances, as well as her anti-clericalism and relationships with men – or lack of them – all formed “evidence” that could be used to convict her of revolutionary activities.

The club association of Louise Keinerkneck Necbecker and Marie Catherine Rogissart contributed to the Clemency Commission's view that their appeals for reduced sentences should be rejected. Keinerkneck Necbecker, a captain in the women's Legion of *Fédérés*, by her own account met at least nine times in the Église St-Eloi in the XII arrondissement. According to police, she regularly spoke under the club's flag emblazoned with, “*La Commune ou la mort!*”<sup>116</sup> Keinerkneck Necbecker also remembered visiting the club at St-Bernard in the XI arrondissement. There, she had collected funds aiding the establishment of a municipal ambulance, something requested of her by her *mairie* of the XII arrondissement. She was ultimately sentenced to five years imprisonment and another ten years of surveillance for having worn visible military insignias. For the military court, the club attendance of this widowed mother of two provided corroboration that she had, indeed, taken an active role in the insurrection. Rogissart, thirty-one at the end of the Commune, was sentenced to forced labor on New Caledonia for her insurrectional activities. The report submitted by authorities along with her personal request for clemency indicates that, “from the first days of the insurrection [she] demonstrated her sympathies for the Commune . . . assiduously frequenting the club

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<sup>116</sup> AN/BB24/756 Demande en Grâce, Necbecker (Veuve) née Keinerkneck, Rapport dated 21 August 1872.

at St Eloi.”<sup>117</sup> Having spoken a number of times as the club’s vice-president, the police linked that role with Rogissart’s participation in a group of women of the XII arrondissement who were “specially charged with looking for *réfractaires* in order to shoot them.”<sup>118</sup> Witnesses testified that they had seen Rogissart near the Place de la Bastille, “accompanied by about fifty women” whom she exhorted as they apparently carried out this plan.<sup>119</sup> Rogissart’s red armband – found in her possession upon her arrest over a year later on 28 June 1872 – marked her as a Commune supporter. However, her presence at St Eloi and testimony about her exhortations contributed significantly to the court’s assessment of her guilt.

The testimony of Poirier, Keinerkneck Necbecker, and Rogissart did not align with their accusers’ summations as to its significance. However, it indicates women’s acknowledgment of their club presence and, given their espoused reasons for attendance, that they viewed clubs as a good location at which to dispense information to women of the community. According to women’s testimony, clubs provided a forum for collecting money, notifying women of work opportunities, as well as public expressions relevant to the Commune. The individual association of Poirier, Bouquet Lucas, Keinerkneck Necbecker, and Rogissart with clubs contributed to their arrests and convictions, as well as perceptions that they were among the “true, wild, *bacchantes*” now entrenched in the sacred spaces of the city after 30 March 1871.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> AN/BB24/781 Demande en Grâce, Rogissart (Marie Catherine), 20 conseil de guerre. AHG/Ly23/Rogissart.

<sup>118</sup> AHG/Ly23/Rogissart.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Fontoulieu uses this term, describing women attempting to burn Notre-Dame de Bercy on 24 May.

Female club attendees situated themselves within universal, though gendered, terms as they answered calls for club attendance. The *affiche* announcing the first meeting of the club at St-Ambroise on 23 April calls on “*citoyens*” to attend.<sup>121</sup> The posting affirms free speech and public meetings as hallmarks of the Commune, as well as the role played by clubs in educating citizenry. It reads, “with the aid of public meetings, we have learned of and defended our rights” and that “*chacun* being able to say what *il* thinks, it will be much easier for us to make decisions about events.” While on the surface implying male attendance, on 15 May, *le Prolétaire*, an organ of the XI arrondissement, in which St-Ambroise is located, counted 3,000 *citoyennes* to the mere 1,000 *citoyens* at the location’s sixth club meeting.<sup>122</sup> The same day as the *Prolétaire* article, Fontoulieu described a 40-year-old attendee known as *la Matelassière*. His report indicates that, “she was truly the queen of the club, and when she appeared at the podium, everyone watched in silence. The priests and religion appeared to be her greatest enemies.”<sup>123</sup> On that day, this “very large virago” asked that they “shoot all the churchmen within 24 hours,” adding on another day, “I have a 16-year-old daughter, and never, as long as I live, will she marry. The other [daughter], presently lives with someone and she is very happy, without the sacraments of the church.”<sup>124</sup> Applause met

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<sup>121</sup> *Murailles* II, 420.

<sup>122</sup> *Le Prolétaire*, 15 May 1871; Announcement in *Murailles* II, 420. For more detailed information on the club at St-Ambroise, see Fontoulieu, *Les Églises de Paris sous la Commune*, 125-133.

<sup>123</sup> Fontoulieu, *Les Églises de Paris sous la Commune*, 127.

<sup>124</sup> I included his use of the term, “virago” here, demonstrating his association of women’s words and appearance with that term. Although certainly many who used the term did so in an attempt to insult as well as report, I suggest its use also represents, in this case, its earlier definition of a strong independent woman.

her declaration.<sup>125</sup> Most every evening at St-Ambroise, *la Matelassière* returned to her “favorite subject,” that being “the assassination of the priests.”<sup>126</sup> The club announcement does not include a specific call to *citoyennes* but *La Matelassière* arrived and participated as a *citoyen*, “defending [her] rights” and “say[ing] what [she] thought,” for which the announcement had called. If the reports in *Le Prolétaire* are anywhere near accurate, thousands of women and men heard her threatening suggestion, as well as her maternal advice. The applause indicates many agreed with her, although the Commune’s government preferred its top-down authority to that of the clubs. *La Matelassière* remains an obscurity however.

As prominent as *La Matelassière* was in this forum for direct democracy, she faded into invisibility in the historical record – with help from women in her neighborhood. At this same meeting at St-Ambroise in May, another woman, saying she had been a “victim of the *curés*,” made a motion for the arrest of all priests, gaining an unexpected – and more radical – response.<sup>127</sup> *La Matelassière* stood up and pounded the podium shouting, “I am voting against this motion, because it is insufficient. They should not arrest them, they should declare them above the law, so that each citizen can kill them as one kills a rabid dog.” These women’s involvement in parliamentary procedure and direct democracy did not extend to republican participation in the Commune’s government, but indicates a forum for true “universal” suffrage during events. Given the infamy of *La Matelassière*, Fontoulieu closes this description a bit

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<sup>125</sup> Fontoulieu, *Les Églises de Paris sous la Commune*, 128.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid.

frustrated with his inability to discover *La Matelassière*'s situation after Bloody Week, noting she did not appear before a tribunal, though he never states her actual name.<sup>128</sup>

Not having learned anything for sure, he quotes a woman he queried on rue Popincourt, who told him, "*La Matelassière*! Ah monsieur, she is doing as well as you."<sup>129</sup>

Fontoulieu's query implies he believed *La Matelassière* to live in the same arrondissement as St-Ambroise – the XI – with the woman's response suggesting he was correct. Women's words or presumed words often convicted them but some like *La Matelassière* evidently escaped later police surveillance, although not the notice of women of their *quartier*. *La Matelassière*, now anonymous to history, was not so to other working women, with her views representative of many others'.

While the top-down preferences of the Commune's leadership rebuffed clubists' more radical calls for sometimes violent change, those calls nonetheless had many legitimized forums. Working women, "here in abundance" at St-Ambroise – a government-sanctioned forum – reveal their fervent support for the anti-clerical views so commented on during and since the Commune.<sup>130</sup> Their zeal reflects attitudes described by other women and men, both during the Commune and previously, during the siege. Reports of resounding applause, while not revealing individual names of attendees, indicate the popularity of the sentiment, if not follow-through. Even when violent solutions were suggested within those meetings, the government did not shut them down, as had the Government of National Defense towards the end of the siege; Commune

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<sup>128</sup> This point, among many, significantly calls into question the acceptability of determining women's Commune participation, based solely in arrest or trial documentation.

<sup>129</sup> Fontoulieu, *Les Églises de Paris sous la Commune*, 128.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

leadership was more likely to shut down reactionary viewpoints, as they did when closing some presses in April.<sup>131</sup> Additionally, while Fontoulieu clearly held biases against communardes, indicated in the preface to his book as well as the fact he was an *abbé*, he frequently uses individuals' names, is very specific with dates and locations, and tends to disclose much more about women's words and actions, less about his emotional opinions.

Fontoulieu certainly displayed some aversion towards his subjects, but also demonstrates evidence-based accuracy. In discussing events at St-Eustache after 6 April, he mentions the names of some of "the *oratrices* [who] were no less in number" than the men.<sup>132</sup> They include, *femme* Brossut, *cantinière* to the 84<sup>th</sup> battalion; Joséphine Dulimbert, who had, during the siege, edited the newspaper, *Moniteur des Citoyennes*; Elisabeth Deguy, who, during Bloody Week, forced a guy named Dabadie, with a gun to his head, to defend the barricades; and Anne-Marie Menans, initially sentenced to death for her presumed status as a *pétroleuse*. (Figure 3.3)<sup>133</sup> All participants mentioned can be cross-referenced in other records and in the case of Deguy and Menans, they

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<sup>131</sup> Communarde André Léo vehemently disagreed with the silencing of opposition, writing in *La Sociale* on 22 April, "If we act like our adversaries, how will the world be able to tell us apart?" and on 14 May, "The people who die for this cause have the right to know who serves them and who betrays them. The true democracy does not mistrust the truth."

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 15. Although in the *Murailles*, 409, the announcement for St-Eustache's opening as the "Club Central de Paris," is grouped with early May affiches, no date is printed on it and it opened in early April, not May.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 15-16. Various witnesses claimed all these women had fought on barricades during the last week. Brossut was arrested while part of the city's street-sweeping corps in July 1872. Dulimbert was arrested and listed as a prisoner, though I have not found her trial record, implying she may have been released at some point – or that she is among those whose records are lost. See, APP/Ba 368. Deguy was sent to New Caledonia for her participation. AN/BB24/764/Elisabeth Deguy. Also, Michel, *Mémoires*, 145.

NWU/Siege of Paris/"Marie Menan" available from <http://www.library.northwestern.edu/spec/siege/images/PAR00654.JPG> ; Internet; accessed 17 July 2005. Menans' name is also produced as Menand (which I generally use in my descriptions of her), Ménand, and Menard in the AN/BB24/744. Her sentence was commuted on 24 July 1872 to hard labor for life at Guyane. Fontoulieu's slight inaccuracy in reciting her name is indicative of many things, but certainly not an attempt to simply replicate what appeared in the official records from 1871 and 1872.

acknowledged their presence at this club. Similar to a print detailing a meeting at St-Eustache, Fontoulieu's specific use of women's names tends to correspond with, but not imitate, other records.<sup>134</sup>

The police and military record of Anne Marie Joseph Menand (Menans, above) indicates intersections with Fontoulieu's record, but not duplications. According to her clemency request, Joseph Menand, a cook by trade, denies setting fires but does not disassociate herself from attendance at the VIII arrondissement's La Madeleine.

Witnesses noticed her participation in its pillage when she supposedly said, "We will be victorious, if we burn all the *baragues* of the rich!"<sup>135</sup> According to Fontoulieu, claiming his knowledge from a Swiss eye-witness, earlier she had been furious at seeing about eighty church-supporting women rally there on 19 May in opposition to its requisition by communardes.<sup>136</sup> She reportedly directed her wrath at a Mme Bermond, whose address Fontoulieu gives on rue Royale in the VIII. Joseph Menand reportedly said, "*Toi, you're part of la clique à Badinguet. On fera ton affaire.*"<sup>137</sup> She added, grabbing the arm of a *fédéré*, "you see all these people here? They will need to be shot," as she ended with, "as for this hovel (*baraque*) over there [La Madeleine], we'll torch it."<sup>138</sup> "This horrible *femme* Menand," almost thirty-four during the Commune, did not deny her presence at La Madeleine or other churches-now-clubs.<sup>139</sup> Her anger at women representing alternate

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<sup>134</sup> A print titled, "Souvenirs de la Commune – Club dans l'église Saint-Eustache," by "C.R.," apparently shows a man speaking, but the room is filled with women, men, and children. MSD/N° inv 1194 Fonds ancien de la Commune de Paris.

<sup>135</sup> AN/BB24/744/Menand (Marie), Demande en Grâce, 4 July 1872 Rapport.

<sup>136</sup> Fontoulieu, *Les Églises de Paris sous la Commune*, 348.

<sup>137</sup> An insulting reference to Louis Napoleon. Ibid., 349.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid. AN/BB24/744. AHG/Ly23/3e conseil de guerre, Menand



views appears to reflect common attitudes among communardes towards the rich, if not those of all working women.

At La Madeleine, women of opposing viewpoints faced each other down, requiring the calling in of more troops and revealing working women's verbal presence on both "sides" of issues. Prior to Menand's outburst, the eighty or so women protested the troops' requisitioning of their sacred space. In addition to Mme Bermond, evidently fairly affluent, one among the crowd, "a domestic about sixty years old pushed her way into the church and despite the threats and revolvers of the insurgents, called them *lâches* and scoundrels."<sup>140</sup> "At news of this threatening group [of women], the Commune delegate hesitated and quickly sent for help at the barracks of la Pépinière [relatively nearby in the VIII], from which two battalions quickly assembled. They surrounded La Madeleine and dispersed the courageous women who had not stopped protesting [events]."<sup>141</sup> Military personnel seizing churches heard the voices and opinions of women of the popular classes, responding with elevated levels of force when women disagreed with their actions. Menand's words – and her history as a sex worker – stood out enough that although her death sentence was commuted in the summer of 1872, it was changed only to a life sentence of hard labor in Guyane.<sup>142</sup> Requisitions served many purposes; though later a venue for club meetings of "*citoyennes* of Montmartre," St-Pierre de Montmartre began its requisitioned status as an atelier.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 348-9.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 349.

<sup>142</sup> AN/BB24/744/5 Août 1872.

<sup>143</sup> Fontoulieu, *Les Églises de Paris sous la Commune*, 50.

The multi-use of churches in working-class arrondissements has as an example Fontoulieu's description of women setting up a workshop to make military uniforms at St-Pierre de Montmartre after 10 April. He detailed the words, activities, and future situations of attendees. For some women mentioned, like Françoise Poujade, I can not immediately find Commune records, although Fontoulieu claims that "in 1854, [she] had been condemned to five years in prison for infanticide."<sup>144</sup> Others visiting St-Pierre de Montmartre, such as Mme Buissard, Anna Jaclard, and Sophie Poirier, as well as those communardes who remain a bit more well-known to historians, such as Paule Mink and André Léo, left longer paper trails.<sup>145</sup> He mentions these women's work in setting up a "free school for girls," under the direction of Mink, "the *parleuse* of the clubs," and another, "a *bas-bleu* de Clignancourt who wrote articles for newspapers during the Commune under a masculine pseudonym," noting that this author was not André Léo.<sup>146</sup> As Carolyn Eichner demonstrates, André Léo and Paule Mink left substantial records, often corroborating club events. Why Fontoulieu sometimes omits names is unclear, but while a masculine pseudonym does not clarify the identity of this occupant of St-Pierre, his mention suggests that female authors may have been more prevalent than newspaper sources might initially suggest. In each of these clubs, Fontoulieu reports specifics, although his entries are not repetitive, generic, nor consistently filled with hyperbole or polemics. His personal comments are often parenthetical, often occurring at the end of an entry.

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 50. Poirier, Mink (at times spelled "Minck," both by herself and others), and Léo have been addressed elsewhere. For Buissard, APP/Ba369/pf5; for Jaclard, APP/Ba368 & Ba1123; AN/BB24/862; AHG/5e Conseil/152..

<sup>146</sup> Fontoulieu, *les Églises de Paris sous la Commune*, 50.

A later author reiterates the observations of supporters *and* detractors of the Commune, indicating women's centrality in clubs even when men attempted to keep them at bay. In his 1910 book on women in the various clubs of the long nineteenth century, Baron Marc de Villiers describes the clubs of the "second siege" (the Paris Commune) as, "*essentiellement féminins*."<sup>147</sup> While likely an overstatement, as are other portions of his work when referring to women, his point directs attention to women's presence in clubs – something substantiated elsewhere. He singled out this point as the most significant difference between the clubs of the two eras. Whether numerically accurate or only perceived as "true" due to the greater threat of women occupying the pulpit, as opposed to a municipal rostrum, remains unclear. In either case, women were there. Some clubs excluded women, or excluded them sometimes, as an addendum to an *affiche* of 15 April suggests in regard to the *Comité Démocratique Socialiste du V arrondissement*. In this case, the men of the club would "no longer admit women" to their nightly meetings "due to elections" being held.<sup>148</sup> However, even in this case the phrasing indicates that women generally attended these daily meetings and now had to be expressly forbidden entry. This situation also indicates that some men saw elections as being gendered strictly male. However, club women sometimes forbade men entrance.

Some working women not necessarily represented in surviving trial records submitted their "communarde" military goals for consideration in an all-female forum. In the XV arrondissement's Église St-Lambert, à Vaugirard on 26 April, this "*Club des*

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<sup>147</sup> Villiers, *Histoire des Clubs de Femmes et des Légions d'Amazones*, 393.

<sup>148</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/1352-X (10-MP-V), V-42. This scene and others like it parallel similar attempts in 1848 meetings.

*femmes patriotes pour la défense de Paris*” met, forbidding entrance to males.<sup>149</sup> A woman of about forty led the meeting, dressed in the uniform of the zouaves.<sup>150</sup> She wore her hair down, with red ribbons entwined, wearing polished boots, which, not reaching her culotte, revealed her legs. She carried two American revolvers at her waist, and had evidently acquired a “following among the female population of Vaugirard.”<sup>151</sup> She, too, hated the church and all it stood for. A *citoyenne* Reidenhrehth had obtained an “authorization to form a battalion of women whom she wanted to call the *Carabinières de la mort*,” although according to the observer, it had not met with success.<sup>152</sup> Unclear is from whom she received authorization and if its lack of “success” meant the group never formed or only that it had never received official sanction. A woman in the leadership of this club, Julie Bourriot, a dressmaker whose address Fontoulieu gives on boulevard Fourneaux in the XII arrondissement, had published articles in *Le Populaire*.<sup>153</sup> Another, a *piqueuse de bottines*, living on the chemin de la Gaité in the XIV, admitted to having two daughters whom she would “punch in the gut if [she] saw them enter a church [as worshipers].”<sup>154</sup>

Fontoulieu had not been able to ascertain what had become of these four communardes in the aftermath of the Commune. However, Julie Bourriot’s clemency

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<sup>149</sup> Fontoulieu, *Les Églises de Paris sous la Commune*, 164. If true, how Fontoulieu gained entry is unclear. He appears to have been fairly unobtrusive in his recordings, but at times interviews contribute to his account, as they had for his entry about La Madeleine on 19 May 1871.

<sup>150</sup> Given the superior military reputation of Zouaves as extremely disciplined, effective units, her choice of uniforms carries particular significance. Although begun as French North African units in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, by 1871, Europeans occupied their ranks and the U.S. Civil War saw troops named and uniformed as, “Zouaves,” on both sides of the war. In all cases, their reputation harked back to the original, battle-hardened North African troops.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 163. Her name also appears in *La Sociale* of 6 May 1871.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 165.

request indicates her continued presence in archival records.<sup>155</sup> That point also reveals that Fontoulieu is not parroting information found in government-sponsored accounts and that in this case, records by or about three of the four individuals he described can not presently be found in traditional archival fonds. In any event, some women met together, refusing admittance to men, wanted to organize themselves in military units, and spoke vehemently against the prior overseers and uses of the space they now occupied. Sometimes, women's words blatantly altered men's priorities.

Events at St-Nicolas des Champs in the III arrondissement drew Fontoulieu's attention to the women there; description also indicates that women could change men's rules.<sup>156</sup> He mentions married couples by name, implying attendance by both sexes and describes occurrences relevant to women's participation. On 20 May – the day before troops entered Paris – one woman proposed that, “to defend Paris, they should replace the sandbags at the barricades with the bodies of the 60,000 priests and 60,000 nuns that she said could be found in Paris.”<sup>157</sup> Fontoulieu initially inserted that, “with noted exceptions,” “the women were there in small numbers.” Their reduced presence was because “it had been decided on 4 May that they could help at the meetings, but they were forbidden to take part in deliberations,” with the men signing identifications cards for women allowed to enter.<sup>158</sup> The woman's suggestion for an alternate military strategy, however, also indicates that those women still asserted their voices, despite their limited numbers. Clotilde Vallet, *Veuve Legros, dite femme Gandon* attended the club at

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<sup>155</sup> AN/BB24/737; BB27.

<sup>156</sup> Fontoulieu, *Les Églises de Paris sous la Commune*, 154-162.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 159.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

St Nicolas des Champs, “never ceasing to say that those refusing to fight for the Commune were cowards and that they should be shot,” though when she attended remains unclear.<sup>159</sup> Vallet Gandon did not deny her attendance, though later attempted to obfuscate her calls for deaths.<sup>160</sup> Fontoulieu adds that although the men had desired only women’s limited participation (“coffee and mimeographs”?), “later they reassessed this measure, and then the women flocked there from everywhere.”<sup>161</sup> For reasons not always presently clear and often against men’s wishes, women asserted the necessity of their presence at club meetings, overriding male determinations. Sometimes, women outnumbered the men.

Given that the Commune was articulated – then and since – as a “workers’ revolution,” a woman titled *La Blanchisseuse* bears further attention. As with *La Matelassière*, her club “title” identifies her with her work, not her citizenship or marital status, although she was also known as *la femme* Lefèvre.<sup>162</sup> Given the numbers of both *blanchisseuses* and *matelassières* in Paris, the employment of those terms as monikers indicates these women’s prominence among the many who could share the job title. *La Blanchisseuse* demands notice for her participation at Saint-Michel, à Batignolles in the XVII arrondissement, where “women were quite numerous.”<sup>163</sup> She worked at the nearby *lavoir Saint-Marie*, rue Legendre. Described as “capable” in her defense of the

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<sup>159</sup> AN/BB24/756, Demande en Grâce de Vve Legros dite femme Gandon. Vallet’s own words are more apparent in her request to be released from the later surveillance component of her sentence; she was already freed from prison by this time. However, since she does not mention her participation in any way at this point, any understanding of how she may have later viewed her trial testimony is lost.

<sup>160</sup> AHG/Ly23/26e Conseil de Guerre/Vallet, Veuve Legros, Gandon.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 224. While I have identified two other Lefèvres, I am yet unable to distinguish if *La Blanchisseuse* is possibly Eugénie or Victorine, although she reportedly died on the barricades on 22 May 1871.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

*drapeau rouge*, Lefèvre was married to one of the commissioners of the club, whom she often referred to from the podium as “a slacker and coward.”<sup>164</sup> She spoke a bit at each meeting, punctuating her arguments with swear words. *La Blanchisseuse* reportedly ended her life on the barricades on 22 May after combating a National Guard captain who teased her about carrying a weapon, “when all is lost.” She called him a coward and, according to witnesses, promptly blew his brains out.<sup>165</sup>

Fontoulieu associated Lefèvre’s attendance and “foolish” actions with Théroigne de Méricourt and Charlotte Corday from an earlier Revolution. He writes, “All of the major social upheavals rose from these women, in whom politics becomes foolishness, and where foolishness becomes a crime.”<sup>166</sup> The role of vociferous women in social upheavals, politics, and therefore crime, was clear to Fontoulieu. However, given that women technically could not be “political” players, their political words and actions could only be defined as “foolishness,” however strong their assertions and whether or not men also held the same views. These women held prominence among their peers, if not Commune leadership and later historians. A limited historical appreciation for the prominence of those working women killed or remaining anonymous has inhibited a consideration of their alternate social, political, and military recommendations, and the supportive forums that heard them. As with Anne-Marie Menand, these supportive forums also heard the suggestions of women associated with prostitution.

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 224-225

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 226.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 225.

During the Commune, those associated with sex work and other unknown women of varying ages had venues for their perspectives. Referring derisively to one speaker as, “*Citoyenne* Amanda,” Fontoulieu heard her suggestion at Saint-Séverin in the V arrondissement on 10 May that the Commune should “organize a battalion of all the *filles soumises* of Paris.” She argued, “We are at least 25,000! Well then, they could make a regiment out of us, give us arms and we will break through the Versaillais!,” which was greeted with loud and long applause.<sup>167</sup> At the same club on 14 May another attendee, formerly a sex worker, complained about the exploitation that women (*filles soumises*) endured at the *maisons de tolerances*, giving details “so intimate that the president made her stop talking.”<sup>168</sup> *La citoyenne* Thourout, *vivandière* for the *Francs-tireurs de Paris*, and the *blanchisseuse* Marcelle spoke regularly, as did Fornarine de Fonsesca, an Italian seemingly proud of the revolutionary heritage of her family’s women. According to Fontoulieu, Fonsesca “never appeared at the tribune without telling about the experiences of her grandmother, hung in Italy on 20 July 1796 for having attacked the king and queen of Naples in a newspaper she had founded under the title of *Moniteur Napolitan*.”<sup>169</sup> Fontoulieu describes another as “a woman of at least seventy years old, stooped, humpbacked, wrinkled, toothless, shrunken. She never spoke, but she followed the debates [at Saint-Séverin] with great attention, approving with a nod of her head the most revolting propositions.” He later adds that, “she called herself Victoire Goden and had

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 288.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid. I can not yet tell if this is a quasi-translation of an Italian paper or possibly a reference to a French-language paper of a slightly different title – or neither.



been the mistress of Lacenaire!!!”<sup>170</sup> Complete names do not always accompany notations of women’s verbal comments and some stood out in their silence. However, these government-sponsored forums reportedly encouraged the expressions of working women of many ages during the Commune.

Women who wrote their memoirs described club women as well. Malvina Souville Blanchecotte wrote that women mounted “the tribune in the churches and proclaimed the advent of human reason.”<sup>171</sup> They represented those like Céleste Hardouin, the schoolteacher arrested in her classroom forty days after the demise of the Commune, on rue des Moulins in the I arrondissement.<sup>172</sup> When taken to the police commissioner in the XVII arrondissement she complained that it was not the arrondissement of her residence. She was told, “Shut up you *communeuse*, you are no longer in a club where you can give long-winded speeches.”<sup>173</sup> Police believed – and Hardouin implies – that she was president of the club on rue de la Reine Blanche in the XIII arrondissement and had presided at the *Club de la Révolution social* in the XVIII arrondissement’s Église St-Bernard. Whatever their views, “everyone” had heard about or seen the participation of women in the clubs during the Commune. Although Fontoulieu made the clubs his sole purview, Blanchecotte’s and Hardouin’s accounts validate the significant association of women – and their oratory – with Commune clubs.

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 288-9. Pierre-François Lacenaire (1800-1836), a poet, was convicted of murder and put to death in April 1836. He nonetheless had a devout female following. Supposedly, Dostoevsky read of his trial and was inspired to write, *Crime and Punishment*, in which the main character’s crime mimics Lacenaire’s in virtually every detail. I can so-far find no further references to Goden.

<sup>171</sup> Blanchecotte, *Tablettes*, 106.

<sup>172</sup> Hardouin, *Détenue de Versailles en 1871*, 1-7.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 10. To this comment, Hardouin responds, “would you shut up, M. le colonel, if they accused you of having killed your father and weren’t allowing you to prove your innocence?” When she complained further as to the improper protocol, she was told that her arrest order indicated that if she resisted, police were to employ “armed force.”

Another church location was the site for a woman's domestic grievance displayed publicly and clearly not in keeping with bourgeois feminine ideals or working men's preferences. At the XVIII arrondissement's Église Saint-Bernard à la Chapelle, *la Club de la Révolution* took over on 27 April.<sup>174</sup> Although a location of many Commune-inspired declarations and Hardouin's club leadership, one evening a divergent scene transpired. "A woman in rags with two young children [in tow] stopped the speaker and spoke," directing her words to her husband, an officer in the *fédérés*. She said, "you lazy coward, you would do better working to feed your children than to come here to *faire le matadore* – you, a former criminal."<sup>175</sup> Fontoulieu intimates that the woman continued, noting that the man had been "eating his rations with the girls, forgetting his family."<sup>176</sup> As was so often the case for women, the divide between public and private was not well marked, during the Commune allowing a woman a public forum to leverage her "private" position, revealing her own interests. Club women were not free from denunciations from members of their own sex.

Demonstrating that women received public condemnation from other women, even if they were not the wives of police, Fontoulieu noted a moment at Notre-Dame de la Croix, à Ménilmontant in the XX arrondissement on 4 May. Describing that every evening club attendees named some "*réac*" not willing to do his National Guard duty, he also said, "women themselves were not free from these threats."<sup>177</sup> On that evening,

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<sup>174</sup> Fontoulieu, *Les Église de Paris sous la Commune*, 81.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid., 84. Fontoulieu implies the "girls" were prostitutes, although it is not clear if this is his opinion or the intimation of the woman speaking. He also states that, "these scenes were repeated all the time in the all the clubs," a statement hard to demonstrate even by reviewing his own account.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 115.

“Adèle Mansiot denounced a young woman by name who lived alone at rue Secrétan 19, as a *Versaillaise*,” although for several years this woman had “been the mistress of one of the men of 4 September.”<sup>178</sup> The author does not offer her name, nor does it so-far appear in other records, although he mentions her father as an 1851 deporté. Mansiot’s reasons for the accusation may have been personal, though not illuminated here. If so, the club forum – as with the woman angry at her husband – allowed for “private” disagreements to be vented in language that implied political, public ramifications. Women, even if not overtly disassociated from the Commune, could still find themselves vulnerable to communarde wrath. Club venues established during the weeks of the Commune created a context in which women of the popular classes could realign the rules of private and public society, determining who – male or female – was worthy of respect or denunciation. Some commentary implies why their prominence became less historically visible.

Artist, “AC,” commented on his experience at a club at St-Pierre de Montrouge in the XIV arrondissement; in doing so, he exposes one way women’s words can become marginalized in the historical record. AC’s written comments are included on the same page as his drawing of events.<sup>179</sup> One day at a luncheon on 28 April, the artist heard of a “women’s club” opening at St-Pierre. Fontoulieu remarked that this club “was one of the most grotesque in Paris; the women were quite numerous there.”<sup>180</sup> AC attended at 3PM

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<sup>178</sup> Ibid.

<sup>179</sup> AN/AB XIX 3353, 18.

<sup>180</sup> Fontoulieu, *Les Églises de Paris sous la Commune*, 207. Fontoulieu believed this club to have opened officially only on 30 April. Whether the church was unofficially occupied previously or whether the dates are slightly off is unclear.

on the same day. His first impression was one of “chaos reigning,” with various cohorts of women arguing. Some of the women questioned one speaker’s loyalty against religion, accusing her of granting “too much respect to the bandit’s hideout” of St-Pierre de Montrouge. Despite the artist’s descriptions of these unfeminine attitudes and activities, he expresses disbelief that one woman had backed up her claim to have “not only . . . pissed, but also . . . shit in the font!” However, he wrote that a “frenetic hurrah welcomed this declaration.” The artist-observer reasoned that, “she was lying for she did not look like she had the courage to do it.” This description nonetheless indicates women’s words – and potentially the actions those words described – could startle audiences, increasing their fear of what these women were capable. Reliance on a man’s own interpretation of a particular, gendered “look,” rather than words in determining women’s truths, had far-reaching effects for females who became associated with the Paris Commune.

The refusal to accept women’s words as having political significance unless a male has seen or can imagine the resulting action, contributed to the actual words and actions of communardes becoming less visible in the reconstructed significance of the Commune. In this particular case, women’s words did not have consistent material meaning to the artist, evidently unless he had seen the actions that to him, the words only represented; mythology arose. Women’s actual words – and those others accused them of uttering – certainly brought them to the attention of many, convicting some. However, “foolishness” should not form the foundation of historical evidence; communardes might be visible and audible, but to some, appeared “foolish” in their seeming

unreasonableness. As Gay Gullickson argues, these un-feminine women simply did not conform to what was “reasonably” expected by “reasonable” males; consequently, they developed primarily as virtual mythological beasts, representing the perversions and insanity of the revolution, rather than the actual participants, goals, and meaning of it. Additionally, men could ultimately control the value and meaning assigned to communarde activities, especially if they denied women their own voices – something Victorine Malenfant Rouchy specifically combated in her writing. By denying the female’s “courage” to “piss in the font,” AC refutes her position as “revolutionary,” relegating her to an adjective-reduced, “female revolutionary,” without the requisite courage – or male equipment. Impressions could mean more than signed testimony.

In the case of Sophie Poirier, for example, an “impression” of her status as *dite* Poirier and the words she supposedly said in clubs weighed heavily in her conviction. Poirier’s dossier includes a signed statement by sixteen people in behalf of “Madame *Veuve* Lemarchand.”<sup>181</sup> While it is not clear who penned the petition representing, “we, the undersigned,” the rhetorical use of this version of Poirier’s name implies an attempt to point out qualities other than her concubinage status. All living nearby, the list reads like a directory of her building at 49, rue des Trois Frères in the XVIII arrondissement, with a few names from 44, 47, 48, 53, and 60. Some list their professions, including charbonnier, “tailleur” and “tailur” (sic). The witnesses testify that the accused “consistently remained in her room during the days of 23 and 24 May 1871, as well as several days following, also [attesting to] her charity.” The letter was signed on 21 July

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<sup>181</sup> AHG/Ly23/26 conseil/101.

1871. Whether the witnesses told the truth or not, in addition to her prior arrests of at least five *sergent de ville* wives, “Madame Veuve Lemarchand” was convicted of having been anywhere but in her home on those days. Impressions mattered, even when other evidence suggested a different reality. Women’s words brought some to view them as seditious.

In only one case does the term seditious appear in trial-related records in regard to the words of a woman.<sup>182</sup> Elodie *Veuve* Pautonnier had her petition for clemency rejected on 29 December 1873, having received a sentence of two years in prison at the conclusion of her trial on 9 March 1872.<sup>183</sup> According to her clemency petition, she claimed not to have publicly “*proféré des cris séditieux*” of which she had been accused.<sup>184</sup> To the best of my knowledge, this is the only time this term appears in women’s trial-related records. Her words do not appear different from those of which many other women were accused and may reflect a particular recorder’s or lawyer’s terminology, rather than any implication that her words were worse than others’. Given her sentence was shorter than those of many other women accused, the seeming harshness of that term does not mirror her sentence. Nonetheless, Pautonnier’s language gave the impression that a woman could make seditious pronouncements, even though she technically could not participate in political or military overthrow of a government. As with Poirier, women’s words continued to argue for their devotion to the revolution, soon to crumble.

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<sup>182</sup> Perhaps other records may eventually yield more examples.

<sup>183</sup> AN/BB24/(2187.S72)/Pautonnier. Pautonnier is another example of a woman whose trial occurred after the “final tally” of 1,051 tried women was submitted.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

During the final week of May 1871, an observer strolled with his father to the corner of a *faubourg*, witnessing the execution of a woman. Noting that “she was the only woman whom I actually saw shot in the streets,” English writer and publisher, Ernest Vizitelly, described her resistance *à outrance*.<sup>185</sup> A horse carrying a gendarme galloped toward Vizitelly and his father and from the shutters above, “a shot suddenly rang out,” felling the gendarme and leaving him, “dead or dying.” According to the account, heads turned upward and a puff of smoke was still visible, indicating the location of the shooter. About “a dozen men battered in the small door of the *porte-cochère* and rushed in”; about 5-10 minutes later, “they reappeared, having with them a gray-haired disheveled woman, whose scanty clothing was badly torn. They drove her before them, then caught hold of her again and pushed her against wall, shouting” at her as they did so, “but she gave no sign of fear.”<sup>186</sup> She drew herself up, and answered tauntingly, “Well done! Well done! You killed my son this morning and now I have killed one of you! *Tas de lâches!*” “Then, as a half-dozen barrels were already leveled at her, she raised her arm, and again opened her mouth,” but her cry died in her throat.<sup>187</sup> “The leveled rifles were discharged, and she fell dead, face downward, upon the pavement.” He concludes that although she was the only woman he saw killed in these types of circumstances, he saw many men killed in the same way and saw the bodies of women on the streets.<sup>188</sup> Even during the final moments of the revolution, some women

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<sup>185</sup> Ernest Vizitelly, *My Adventures in the Commune: Paris 1871*, 307.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

continued their verbal assaults, declaring their reasons for fighting – and for firing weapons.

In addition to women's expressed viewpoints during the final hours of the Commune, knowledge of gendered skills associated women with arson, in particular. Women, not men, most often collected, purchased, and made use of oil for cooking and heating, making them proficient in its employment. In a report to the Clemency Commission, Marie Bouquet Lucas mentions her previous sentence of twenty years of hard labor for her participation in the Commune.<sup>189</sup> Supposedly, on 23 May, she came to the barricades on the rue Jean Beausire in the IV arrondissement, where, "according to witnesses, she inflamed them with her words." She verbally threatened witnesses with physical harm if they reported her. She next stopped in front of the *mairie* of the IV arrondissement, stating, "We must burn the *Versillais* like pigs." Finally, she indicated to the (male) *fédérés* "the way to use petrol with a bottle and wick." Although accusers may have had their own reasons for denouncing a woman – and women's words also indicted many – most working women would not have been able to defend themselves against an accusation that they knew how to light a fire with petrol, or had the materials on hand to do so. Women continued to threaten men.

Women's threats towards men dodging their Commune duties continued well into the last week. In defending her reasons for being in the streets on 24 May, Mme Armand claimed to have gone "to look for the Guards of the 172<sup>nd</sup> Battalion . . . so that they might

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<sup>189</sup> AN/ BB24/746 Lucas (Marie Jeanne) (Bouquet), Demande en Grâce, Rapport of 26 July 1872. Bouquet Lucas died in the maison centrale d'Auberine 16 March 1876.



“arrest a *réfractaire*, Monsieur Robida.”<sup>190</sup> Armand had gained a bad reputation among those who denounced her, although the focus of the original police investigation was her husband. However, by 24 May the stakes had increased for those avoiding National Guard service, at least as far as communardes were concerned. According to witnesses, she threatened men, “always speaking of her intention to burn their houses.” Although this record does not indicate whether or not Armand admitted to this point, she had admitted to looking for the National Guards in order to have them arrest recalcitrant citizens. Real or invented comments by women about setting structures ablaze – no matter when they uttered them – now became indictable.

Women were not merely arrested to implicate their male companions. Many women came to the attention of neighbors, police, and military personnel due to their proximity to military barricades; in particular, their words while there could indict them. Although her husband was arrested, then released, Marie Cogniette Daubignard received a sentence of five years detention and lifetime surveillance.<sup>191</sup> Three male witnesses testified against her, providing depositions. They all said they had seen her at 10AM on 22 May, “working to construct the barricade with insurgents [on] avenue Clichy.” That was not the only testimony. “*Femme* Sirly saw her running, at that moment, with *fédérés*, and heard her say the following: ‘All the *canailles* who have hid themselves away in their cellars – I’ll denounce them [all].’” The police “knew her as an immoral woman, with very exalted opinions.” Previously convicted for theft and “habitual corruption of

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<sup>190</sup> APP/Ba 369/pf4

<sup>191</sup> AN/ BB24/746 Daubignard (Marie) née Cogniette. The woman herself spells her name, Clognette. However, within the document, it is also spelled Cognette and the only place it is spelled as she spells it is where she signs her request for a pardon.

minors,” she had little chance of gaining her freedom, despite being a mother of three.<sup>192</sup> Her “guilt” due to her presence at the barricades appears compounded by what she said, once there.

At her trial after the Commune, Nathalie Duval Lemel, 45 during the Commune, heard testimony that during the last week of the Commune, she had, on arrest and “[with] her hands and lips black [and] covered in [gun]powder, reported that she had fought for 48 hours without eating and she added, with much animosity, ‘We are beaten, but not vanquished!’”<sup>193</sup> Concierges, Mmes Lallier and Tissot, both heard “five or six women,” including Duval LeMel, declare that they “hadn’t eaten in 48 hours” while serving on the barricades. At least two more saw Duval LeMel and two of these other women “fighting fiercely behind the barricade at the Place Pigalle at the foot of the XVIII arrondissement. One of them, quite aged, incited the others to defend themselves.” Perhaps less physically able to participate in the defense, this aged woman reportedly rallied others with her words. As barricades became indefensible, “*elles* moved to the barricade at the rue des Martyrs,” now retreating up the hill into the familiar territory of Montmartre.<sup>194</sup> Duval LeMel admitted taking part in events. As vivid as this communarde was in her revolutionary zeal, she was also rhetorically adept. One deposed witness also testified that she had heard her in clubs where Duval LeMel had spoken “about mothers of families producing good *citoyens* and other things of this nature,” as she vehemently

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<sup>192</sup> In her appeal in 1874, Clognette attempts to gain her freedom by requesting her clemency in the name of the children, “who for three years have been deprived of their mother’s care, which they need.” She did not receive clemency.

<sup>193</sup> AHG/Ly23/688, dossier Duval Lemel, “Process Verbal.”

<sup>194</sup> AHG/Ly23/688, dossier Duval Lemel, Dated 19 August 1872. Communardes retreated in approximately a southwest to northeast direction in front of the advancing Versaillais force, making the working-class districts the last to see fighting.

argued for “societies of workers.” Her words, from at least 1868 through the last hours of the Commune, contributed to police and military efforts condemning her.

The first day of the “Revolution of 18 March” centered women, including those of the most marginalized segments of Paris society, at the forefront of events, if not ultimately in the historical record. Although by all accounts especially visible on that day, women’s participation had only begun. Their loud confrontation with the regular army as they went about their early-morning chores preceded the ability of the National Guard – or any other men – to respond to the threat of Versailles troops attempting to take the subscriptioned cannons, paid for by the labors of women, as well as men. As Louise Michel described that day, “the Revolution was made.”<sup>195</sup> Later that day however, newspaper headlines declared, “Surprise! Montmartre attacked, cannons taken, the National Guard is fraternizing with the army, the soldiers have put their rifle butts in the air, General Lecomte is prisoner.”<sup>196</sup> Women were already disappearing from the record, even when their voices had created the historical moment. That so many women participated in political clubs, where minutes generally were not taken and where often-anonymous crowds gathered, has also minimized their archival visibility. Plus, many participants died or slipped back into invisibility, once the tables turned against the Commune. While “hearsay” held up in courts trying them, women’s voluble testimony during the weeks of the Commune became drowned out in the collective telling of those weeks.

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<sup>195</sup> Louise Michel, *La Commune*, 164.

<sup>196</sup> Brocher, *Souvenirs*, 156. This is a reasonable account of the collection of headlines. This also points to reasons to question the ability of newspaper records to be consistently used as prioritized evidence for the significance of women’s lives, although surely they can be an invaluable component.

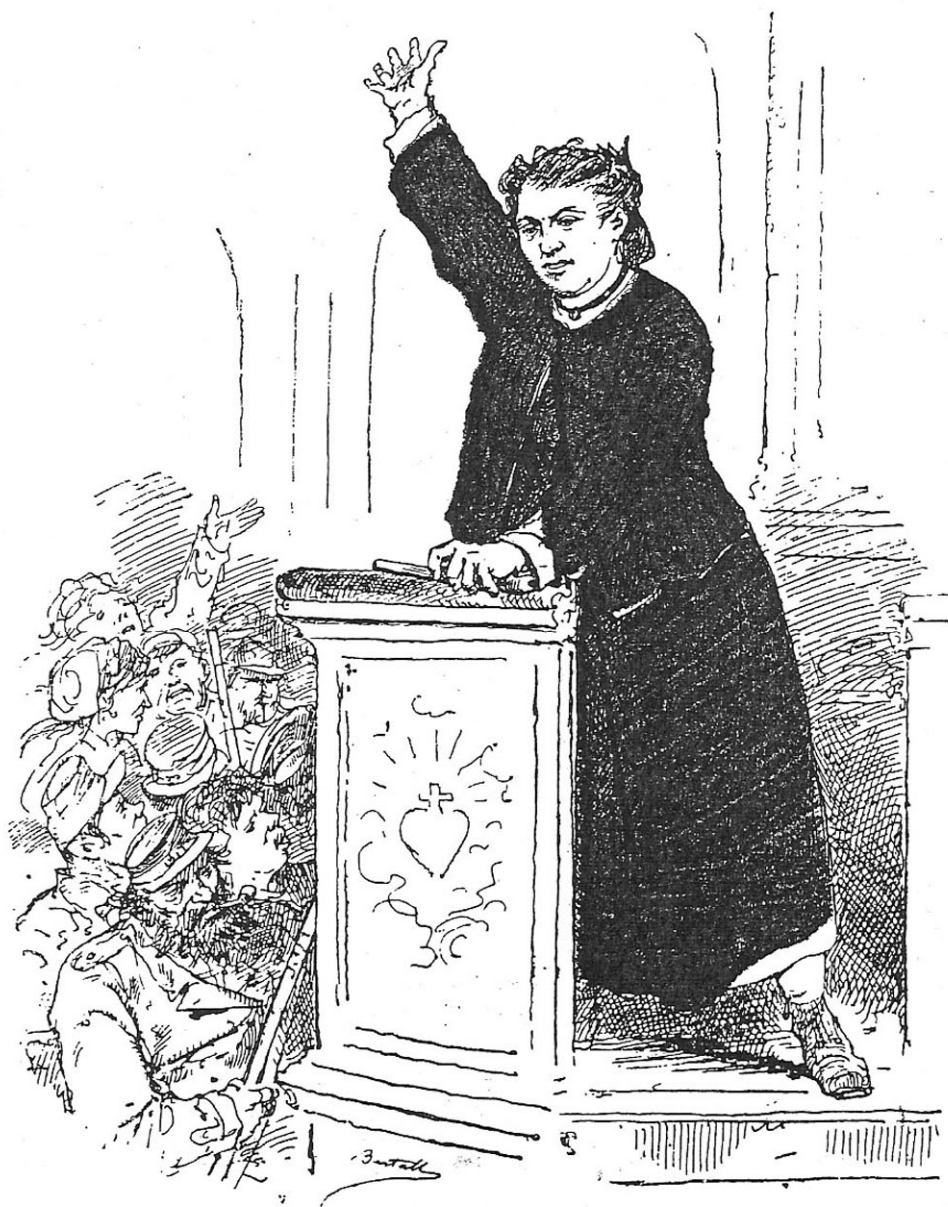
This chapter argued that women vocally expressed their perceptions of events, sometimes employing a gendered analysis in doing so. Women of a range of classes commented on the verbal assertions of other women, and in so doing, expressed “feminist” concerns. The daughters of doctors, revolutionaries, and British merchants, as well as unemployed mattress makers, bookbinders, and sex workers contributed their viewpoints, altering gendered assumptions about this revolution and making “working-class” interests more visible. Male leadership elected in the wake of women’s 18 March verbal declaration perceived women’s participation as crucial to the Commune’s success, as placards, distributions of money, military requests for uniforms, and Mayor Malon’s words indicate. Commune government leaders requisitioned churches that became public spaces for women’s discussion and debate, closing none of them. Where relevant, women fought back against their sex-based exclusion from clubs.<sup>197</sup> Other men took notice of women’s words in clubs, fearing – at times, disbelieving – their adamancy and likely, their political astuteness.

This chapter also supports the argument that women’s words brought them attention in various contexts across the landscape of Paris, not just in Montmartre, the Commune’s perceived home base. While that arrondissement divulged the majority of this chapter’s examples, the I, III, VIII, XI, and XII arrondissements included at least five references each, with the IV arrondissement revealing only one less than Montmartre’s thirteen. The V, IX, XIV, XVII, XIX, and XX arrondissements each contributed at least

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<sup>197</sup> This was also true in 1848. Relevant to police concerns about club women in particular, prior to June Days, the Club de la Voix des femmes was invaded repeatedly by “ruffians,” sent to harass the women and break up the club. The members decided to exclude men from meetings after 11 May 1848, although they later allowed them entrance if they paid a doubled entry fee. However, the police did what the effects of the ruffians could not: shut down the women’s club. Moses, *French Feminism*, 142.

three examples of women's individual or collective expressions. Another dozen or so generalized comments about women's words, not attributable to a particular location wove through the chapter. Presently, this geographical distribution roughly represents women's vocal presence in the extant record, though future assessments may alter that allotment. Combined, the references indicate not only the significance of women's collective words in revealing roles of ordinary women in events, but that a wide swath of the Parisian population heard or was aware of their stances. This geographical visibility – even audibility – means Commune-associated viewpoints did not come only from elected or military personnel, or even male socialist supporters, nor did they come only from the gendered representation produced. Police aligned women and their spoken threats with the deaths of generals; incitement of male National Guards; arrests of police wives; violent confrontations with troops; and angry attacks on the clergy, bourgeoisie, “slackers” on the barricades, and other recalcitrant men. Police records expose an unparalleled number of women detainees, overwhelming the system. Some women ended their lives with the words, “Vive la Commune!” on their lips, or died trying. All saw the Commune through their gendered experiences; many apparently had something to say about it.



**FIGURE 3.1, Bertall, “Le club à l’église.”**  
Northwestern University Charles Deering McCormick  
Special Collections Library



**FIGURE 3.2, Bertall, "Orateur de boulevard."  
Northwestern University Charles Deering McCormick  
Special Collections Library**



**FIGURE 3.3, Marie Ménand.**  
Northwestern University Charles Deering McCormick  
Special Collections Library





**FIGURE 3.4, Map of Women's Church Occupation and Verbal Assertions.**  
 Map represents known geographical range of communarde verbal presence during 1871 Paris Commune.

† - Confirmed women-occupied church club (27/51 recorded church clubs).  
 x - Women's verbal presence asserted at non-church site, recorded in this chapter.

#### IV. “TAKING ONE’S PART IN THE REVOLUTION”: WOMEN’S POLITICAL PRESSURE TACTICS (18 MARCH-28 MAY 1871)

During the siege, the anonymous “*Citoyenne Destrée*” wrote, “The Social Revolution will not be operative until women are equal to men. Until then, one has only the appearance of Revolution.”<sup>1</sup> This statement reveals a presently anonymous *citoyenne*’s gendered analysis of revolutionary change, months prior to the Commune’s eruption. Her January declaration aligns with André Léo’s 8 May published letter to General Dombrowski, overseeing all Commune military forces. She queried,

Do you know, General Dombrowski, how the Revolution of March 18th [the Paris Commune] was made? By the women . . . the necessity of taking one’s part in the Revolution, is the liberty and the responsibility of every human being, with no limit except common law, without any privilege of race, or of sex.<sup>2</sup>

At least from the early-morning hours of 18 March 1871, women, she argued, had begun and carried out this revolution – days before universally-male suffrage elected a Commune governing body. Her statement also implies, not that men had not been around, but that the labor of all human beings was needed for a revolution to succeed. Eighty years earlier, French republican men had abolished legal feudal privilege and questioned raced-base slavery.<sup>3</sup> With 1848 seeing the establishment of universal male suffrage and the end of French-sponsored slavery, Léo’s rhetoric of liberty, law, and

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<sup>1</sup> Evidently these words first appeared written or etched into the *Club de l’École de Médecine*, which opened on 28 December 1870. Opening date from M. G. Molinari, *Les clubs rouges pendant le siège de Paris* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1871), 197. Martin Johnson used the term, “epigraph” in referring to their appearance at the club. Martin Johnson, *The Paradise of Association: Political Culture and Popular Organizations in the Paris Commune of 1871* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1996), 235, 265. They later appeared in the newspaper, *La Lutte à Oustrance* on 9 January 1871 (19 Nivôse 79), with the same *citoyenne*’s name attached.

<sup>2</sup> *La Sociale*, 8 Mai 1871. Also, IISG/A. Léo #31: Imprimés & docs 1869-1871.

<sup>3</sup> Although abolition of slavery and the slave trade was not permanently complete until 1848, anti-slavery rhetoric and legislation was an essential component of the Revolution begun in 1789.

privilege powerfully reminded men now fighting for a new order that women were not going to be used as mere *corvée* labor in a re-created white, male, feudal regime.

Discursively phrased as a question, Léo's logic rested in the fact General Dombrowski held a memory in common with her broader readership: women fomented the events of March 18. Through Léo's individual chastising voice, these same women now reminded the formal officers of the Commune, singularly represented in Dombrowski, that women held a right to participate equally with men. Further, the revolution now underway did not subsist without women. No longer did any historical, legal, or social justification exist for their exclusion. Léo based her present argument in women's actions of 18 March and since. She categorized females as responsive and responsible humans who have not only a right, but also an obligation to act as revolutionaries. Invoking rights-based political discourse, Léo exposed that engaging in revolution was synonymous with engaging in politics. She politically employed her position as newspaper editor – as well as a solid knowledge of revolutionary, republican, and Commune discourse – to pressure communard political and military leadership in behalf of women as a class. While the Commune's elected political body came to represent the revolution, this chapter counters that limited interpretation; politically and otherwise, the Commune was something much larger than its elected membership.

This chapter argues that throughout the Commune, women exerted sustained, if often haphazard, political pressure on male political leadership in an attempt to effect change. At times these efforts represented (or claimed to represent) a collectivity of women, while at other moments, only a few individuals came forward to articulate an

unfair, gendered burden. Their efforts expose a universalization of political tools, which, in addition to free speech analyzed in Chapter III, included demonstrations, petitioning, proclamations, meetings to disburse information, acts of direct democracy within constituent meetings, and newspaper editorials like those of Léo. Commune discourse aided their efforts. This chapter also argues that some tactics learned during the siege were employed for the Commune. As during the siege, government leaders recognized women's significance, both in aiding their cause and in opposing some of their priorities. Also demonstrated, police and other male observers tended to characterize most, if not all, women and women's groups as worthy of suspicion. Studying women's political pressure tactics during the Commune exposes municipal suffrage as a limited indicator of political expression and influence, especially when situated in a wider understanding of politics. As did Léo, ordinary women expressed their willingness, even demands, to seize their equal share of liberty and responsibilities, despite no formal suffrage.

### **Women and Commune Politics**

As had men's political efforts for 100 years, women-generated political pressure found expression outside of suffrage, revealing the limits of male political power within a revolution such as the Commune.<sup>4</sup> In addition to verbal expression in clubs and on the streets, women demonstrated, visited government offices, petitioned, wrote letters,

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<sup>4</sup> Often overlooked in discussions of republican suffrage and women's use of it, is the fact that men and women exerted effective political pressure long before gaining civil voting rights, as well as after. Political pressure tactics involving petitioning, ribbons or pins adorning attire, street-corner orators, door-to-door canvassing, and Letters to the Editor and other newspaper commentary in support of liberal changes had surfaced in the late-eighteenth century – in particular within the British abolition movement. Women had employed them previously – in France and elsewhere – at moments when freedoms of speech, press, and movement expanded. For their use during Britain's abolition movement, see, Adam Hoschschild, *Bury the Chains: Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free an Empire's Slaves* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2005). I thank Erin Hutchinson for directing me to this point.

submitted requests – and bills – for funds, and engaged in public relations campaigns. Some, as Malvina Blanchecotte’s account and other trial records describe, collectively wore red ribbons or insignias, symbolizing their alignment with the Commune.<sup>5</sup> With rare exception, post-Commune records mention the wearing of red sashes, ribbons, or other attire as indicative of a woman’s (or man’s) association with the Commune. Women also published, organized – sometimes centralized – their efforts, and communicated with each other as they promoted their goals. Some of their goals included employment, fair pay, and secular education for girls and women. These actions often left records, contributing to the attention paid women by police and military officials, having as their goal the annihilation of the Commune.

The Commune has often been discussed as if its formalized political body – and the singular finalized law it passed – was synonymous with the event; however, dating it from 18 March should have long-ago suggested that the Commune was something larger than its elections or legislative decisions. Given its 18 March genesis, any definition – political or otherwise – included the actions of many ordinary working women.<sup>6</sup> Formally, women (and one could add the poor, immigrants, and the aged more generally) had previously occupied only the political margins, if allowed to venture into political territory at all. With the advent of the Commune, however, its elected representatives heard from the entire spectrum of society, including its marginal majorities. Memoirs, trial testimony, public postings, and letters all bear witness to the regular contact

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<sup>5</sup> Christine Planté, ed., *Tablettes d’une femme pendant la Commune A.-M. (Malvina) Blanchecotte* (Tusson: Du Lérot, 1996[1872]), 40-1.

<sup>6</sup> Its demise is consistently listed as 28 May, as that was the day the last barricade fell. However, its government had ceased functioning at least by the 26th.

Commune representatives had with their constituency. The Commune government limited oppositional press and speech, though Léo and others argued heartily against those restrictions, suggesting that had the Commune lasted longer, restrictions may have been reduced or eliminated. However, I have found no evidence it otherwise refused speech, press, or other input from supporters – even those from the most frayed of the political and social fringes. While the Commune’s officials did not follow those fringes, they armed, heard from, and attempted to satisfy many of them. As Léo’s remarks indicate, Commune rhetoric of equality and liberty could not easily accommodate “except for women” clauses.

Studying male-proffered suffrage as a marker of equality or political power has limited historians’ analysis of women’s centrality in the social-political Revolution of 18 March. Elisée Reclus’s alliance with the Commune influenced his integration of human behavior with physical geography. Writing of Reclus, geographer Marie Fleming argues that during the Commune, the elected men followed traditional political roles, failing “to comprehend the revolutionary movement [not the election] which had brought them to power in the first place.” The Commune was, therefore, “insurrectional below but governmental above.”<sup>7</sup> Recognizing the Commune as a women-generated insurrection, rather than another exercise in universal male suffrage, begins to divulge women’s “insurrectional” political effectiveness throughout.

During the Commune, only one political pressure tactic was denied women as a class: municipal election suffrage. All others were available. Perhaps it is no wonder

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<sup>7</sup> Marie Fleming, *The Geography of Freedom: The Odyssey of Elisée Reclus* (Montréal: Black Rose Books, 1988), 90.

communardes did not press for suffrage. As Michelle Perrot points out, in French, *le pouvoir* has a male political connotation, while the plural, *des pouvoirs* breaks up into any number of fragments, revealing arenas of women's powers.<sup>8</sup> Previously however, the singular form has been the priority when assessing Commune power.<sup>9</sup> Women asserted themselves in ways that served their own perspectives and purposes. They voted in political clubs, at *Union des femmes* meetings, and at Vigilance Committee meetings, if not in the same political contexts declared as important by historians of republicanism.<sup>10</sup> Women "made the revolution" more to their liking by acting as agents of all types of political pressure.

Commune discourse includes references to the Commune era's *Union des femmes pour la défense de Paris et les soins aux blessés* as the most recent and effective example of women's collective revolutionary participation. In 1848, within memory of many participants, women "had remained firm in their belief that group solidarity was necessary to establish women's influence in the political arena" whether or not they had

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<sup>8</sup> Michelle Perrot, "Women, Power, and History: The Case of Nineteenth-Century France," in *Women, State and Revolution: Essays on Power and Gender in Europe Since 1789*, ed., Siân Reynolds (Sussex: Wheatsheaf Books, 1986), 44.

<sup>9</sup> This exclusion is not unique to discussions of Commune political power. For a contemporary analogy, demonstrating women's significant political pressure on male voters, see, Elsa Barkley Brown, "To Catch the Vision of Freedom: Reconstructing Southern Black Women's Political History, 1865-1880," *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women's History*, 3d ed. Vicki L. Ruiz & Ellen Carol DuBois, eds. (New York: Routledge, 2000): 124-146.

<sup>10</sup> As Elinor A. Accampo argues, although republican political theory never factored women into "rights" issues, men did not ignore women. The "Social Question" could not be separated from the "Women Question." Accampo, "Gender, Social Policy, and the Formation of the Third Republic," in *Gender and the Politics of Reform in France, 1870-1914*, eds., Elinor A. Accampo, Rachel G. Fuchs, and Mary Lynn Stewart (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1995), 2. Laura S. Struminger cites Daniel Stern's remarks about women's situation in the First French Revolution. Stern wrote, "after having encouraged [women] to show their faces on the political scene [of republicanism], the Revolution threw them back down, into the shadows." Struminger "Looking Back: Women of 1848 and the Revolutionary Heritage of 1789," *Women and Politics in the Age of the Democratic Revolution*, eds., Harriet B. Applewhite and Darline G. Levy (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 282.

been able to maintain such solidarity.<sup>11</sup> In the spring of 1871, an unnamed commentator in *Le Vengeur* lent support to the Commune's *Union des femmes*. S/he indicated that having seen three revolutions, finally, "for the first time I have seen the women involve themselves with resolution . . . It seems that this revolution is precisely theirs, and that in defending it, they defend their true future."<sup>12</sup> The editorial comment implies the noticeable political presence of women during the Commune; their visibility was actual and discursive. While significant to the editorialist in *Le Vengeur*, the organization and effectiveness of the *Union des femmes* also brought Eugene Schulkind's attention to the intersection of class and sex in Commune history. Most recently, Carolyn Eichner argues that Elisabeth Dmitrieff's organizational oversight of the *Union* contributed to feminist socialism during the Commune.<sup>13</sup> Although relevant to this chapter's subject, the *Union*'s primacy in representing women's Commune influence or involvement formally limits the purview of women's political pressure to its membership and effectiveness between 12 April and 24 May. This chapter demonstrates that the *Union* was not the source for all political tactics emanating from women.

In addition to women's influence extending back prior to Commune municipal elections, often enough, women's actions either persuaded elected officials or overrode their veto, serving as a contrary force against those males who technically held more power. Even when the rape and murder of an *ambulancière* by Versailles troops was

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<sup>11</sup> Laura Struminger, "Looking Back: Women of 1848 and the Revolutionary Heritage of 1789," 260.

<sup>12</sup> Cited in Carolyn Eichner, *Surmounting the Barricades: Women in the Paris Commune* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 139-40. Given the third-person voice, the author may have been a man, although women authors' attempts to hide their "true" sex, as well as the many unsigned editorials in newspapers of the day, preclude positive identification.

<sup>13</sup> Eichner, "Elisabeth Dmitrieff and the *Union des femmes*: Revolutionizing Women's Labor" in *Surmounting the Barricades*, 69-96.



revealed during meetings of the Commune or when distribution of money for women's work formed a topic of discussion by the same body, issues often bogged down in bureaucratic or republican protocol.<sup>14</sup> Also, Commune officials frequently and contentiously disagreed. This limited the male body's ability to respond quickly. As David Barry describes, women "kept up a barrage of pressure on the organs of the Commune government to respond to their needs," preparing ultimately "to fight shoulder to shoulder with the men for their own vision of the Commune."<sup>15</sup> This "barrage of pressure" included many weapons bringing them to the attention of communards as well as their enemies.

Evidence indicates that informally- and formally-organized groups of women formed a locus of attention for police and others much earlier than Bloody Week, possibly encouraging later assumptions about their organized responsibilities for fires. Some, if not most, fires began due to bombardment and other military maneuvers, as authorities understood when the Prussians attacked the city during the siege. Commune authorities also directed acts of arson as a military tactic. Although the *pétroleuse* is representational, some women likely set fire to buildings as they retreated from the southwest of the city towards the northeast.<sup>16</sup> Fear of female fire-starters suggests the police and military now saw themselves under attack by women – though certainly not only so – even more than from the Prussians who still occupied territory around Paris.

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<sup>14</sup> For Lieutenant Butin's report to the Commune of the rape and murder of an ambulancière by five Versailles, see Georges Bourgin and Gabriel Henriot, eds., *Procès-Verbaux de la Commune de 1871*, Tome II (Mai 1871) (Paris: Imprimerie A. Lahure, 1945), 380-381. For an example of a discussion about the funding of women's work, see Bourgin, *Procès Verbaux*, Tome II, 228-341.

<sup>15</sup> David Barry, *Women and Political Insurgency: France in Mid-Nineteenth Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 199), 119.

<sup>16</sup> This issue is argued more fully in Chapter V.

The military troops representing the government of Moral Order killed women and children as they gained control of the “mob” of Paris and its buildings. Siege-era military laws still in effect made this especially defensible, as did a total war environment. Letters and memoirs indicate that any woman could be a target of arrest or execution during Bloody Week, revealing that often, the common denominator for attention was their sex category only.

As Moira Gatens argues, “I have never encountered an image of a *human* body. Images of human bodies are images of either male bodies or female bodies.”<sup>17</sup> Especially during the Commune’s bloody repression, though not only so, women’s bodies formed a particular target for authorities attempting to annihilate all vestiges of the revolution. Slitting open clothing of the dead, assessing their “true” sex, was part of clearing barricades. Troops regularly stripped and raped women’s bodies, sometimes either before or after killing them. Some artists, while attempting only to “report” women’s actions, rather than caricature them, exaggerated “female” body parts. In doing so, they demonstrated that these bodies in military attire or behaving crudely were, in fact, those of women. Dumas represented the “blind hate and ferocity of the reactionaries,” when disavowing communardes as neither women nor female, disassociating them from their bodily sex markers, until death.<sup>18</sup> In the case of Commune era sources, women often omit bodily references such as body odor, the specifics of childbirth, menstruation, breasts, sex acts, incest, or rape, making those that mention them, noticeable. Historians

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<sup>17</sup> Cited in Barbara Brook, *Feminist Perspectives on the Body* (London: Longman, 1999), 2. Original in Moira Gatens, “Corporeal Representations in/and the Body Politic,” in R. Diprose and R. Ferrell, eds. *Cartographies* (St. Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1990), 82.

<sup>18</sup> Paul Milliet, ed. *Une famille de républicains fouriéristes: les Milliet*, Vol. X (Paris: 1911), 114.

have recently paid more attention to the body, though notice of sexed, raced, and classed bodies has been less consistent.

Michel Foucault, Mikhail Bakhtin, and Norbert Elias all “encouraged historians’ fascination with the body,” but as Phillis Mack points out, the focus in these cases has most often remained on the white, male body.<sup>19</sup> While Foucault is ubiquitously cited as the initial, even key, theorist in this field, “concurrent and earlier work from feminists argued consistently that women in particular have rarely (if ever) traveled as light” with their bodies as men.<sup>20</sup> Dorinda Outram, in *The Body and the French Revolution*, argues that the 1789 Revolution was, in many ways, a contest for dominance between male and female bodies.<sup>21</sup> For Outram, this competition resulted in the validation of only male political participation, though ultimately excluding men of the gendered “lower” classes.<sup>22</sup> During the Commune’s annihilation, the attention paid to female bodies marked some for death, whatever their other words or actions. Feminist analysis of the body reveals women as centers of attention during the Commune. Gender analysis in this chapter discloses that officially-produced discourse in police files parallels this perspective.

Noticing official military and police discourse about women does not always expose women’s own views about their participation, but rather, how women formed a

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<sup>19</sup> Phillis Mack, *Forging Identities: Bodies, Gender, and Feminist Theory* (Nedlands: Western Australia Press, 1997), xiv-xviii.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted from philosopher, Elizabeth Grosz’s book, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 2. Grosz cites Simone de Beauvoir, as well as her critics, as exceptions, but French materialist feminists, noted earlier, are part of this body of work, often preceding Foucault, and rarely noticed.

<sup>21</sup> Dorinda Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution: Sex, Class, and Political Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

<sup>22</sup> Outram, *The Body and the French Revolution*, 164.

collective suspect class and how the Commune's historiography has tended to misrepresent this point. Despite the long history of women's arrests for prostitution, theft, and bad public behavior, post-Commune police prefects consistently and vehemently complained to their superiors and to Versailles military courts of having to house so many women. Their facilities and manpower simply could not cope with the deluge.<sup>23</sup> Consistently ignored in prior historical assessments, the "final tally," of 1,051 women "*prévenues de participation à l'insurrection parisienne*," often used to judge the numbers of accused female "political detainees," dates from February 1872, years before arrests and trials ceased.<sup>24</sup> Police arrested thousands more, for which their bureaucracy and facilities were woefully unprepared – and which historians have generally ignored. Perhaps the disregard is because extensive information about these individuals is not readily available. In one case, a "very urgent" report dated 22 June 1871 indicated that one depot contained more than 200 women, of which 120 were being held for insurrection.<sup>25</sup> The police virtually beg for a transfer of the women to St Lazare prison. Something was different about women's participation and assumed participation, belying conventional boundaries. Police processed thousands of women as disenfranchised "political detainees"; their influence was widespread during the Commune.

### **18 March – 28 May 1871**

Women marched in demonstrations, drawing the attention of citizenry and

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<sup>23</sup> Summary of APP files, Ba 365-1 (16-31 May 1871) to Ba 365-4 (1 October - 31 December 1871).

<sup>24</sup> APP/Ba 365-5/19 Février 1872. This figure was used as the basis of the *Enquête*'s statistics, published in June 1872, as well as the conclusions of recent historians. I am not aware of any work that directly points out this anachronism. Although still a large number in many respects, it has been repeatedly used in discussions of women's numerical participation and does not address how many women took part in some way, were arrested or killed, or died before sentencing.

<sup>25</sup> APP/Ba 369/pf1.

newspaper writers. In handwritten comments accompanying his drawings of 19 March, the unidentified, “AC,” portrays the oft-noted demonstration by women wanting to march on Versailles.<sup>26</sup> Displaying “a particular interest in the women of the Commune,” AC included text for each sketch, “often filled with details, giving precisely the place, the date, and the circumstances of each scene depicted.”<sup>27</sup> According to the artist’s notes, the women in all his drawings posed for him at least briefly at his request, including “the women in navy uniforms at Grenelle, as well as the women incendiaries of the Rue du Bac and Rue de Lille, the canteen women of the ‘Vengeurs’ of Flourens, the canteen women of the Zouaves, the gunlayers, the troops of Grenelle, etc., etc.”<sup>28</sup> First mentioning that Generals Thomas and Lecomte were shot the day before, he described the protesting women from the Saint-Marcel neighborhood in the XIII arrondissement. Their leader, a “giant who is nearly 6’5” was known as “a sleepwalker who lives on rue de Clisson near rue des Rentiers, also in the XIII. He elaborated that she “went many times to the dances at the Bal du Vivier and to the cabaret on the Rue de Grenelle.” This “giant” presently led fifty-nine women, arrayed in eleven rows of five women, with three at the rear. They all wore red scarves – within twenty-four hours having already becoming an evidentiary mark of communardes. The artist jotted down their goals, which were “to thank the Committee of the National Guard” for their announcement of forty-eight cannons with which to defend Paris; “to be present at the funeral procession of

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<sup>26</sup> AN/AB XIX 3353/17. AC’s preserved sketches are presently divided between the AN and NWU (possibly elsewhere too), with the AN collection including 26, and NWU with 4 in NWU/Siege & Commune of Paris/Etchings/pf1/71, 72, 119, 120. The ones in the NWU collection were drawn on light blue paper, making the copy quality poorer than for AN sketches. I have not seen references to this connection elsewhere, nor have I seen the NWU sketches cited. None were published.

<sup>27</sup> AN/AB XIX 3353. The archival introduction to the drawings includes this phrasing.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

Charles Hugo;” and to “go to Versailles to seize the government.”<sup>29</sup>

In this case, women took their goals and outrage to the streets, making their physical presence a political statement in itself. Refraining from direct ridicule of their political passion for seizing the government, AC’s study, and perhaps his sympathies, led him to conclude that, “these are women and girls without work who are looking for a means to live.” They were “frustrated at having missed the convoy and at not having been received by the Central Committee.” If unemployed, these women represent the economic circumstances of thousands who had survived the siege, but had not recovered from it. While the missed sighting seems to have spontaneously agitated the demonstrators, they had additional grievances. The National Guard’s Central Committee, elected on 15 March, declined to formally acknowledge the fifty-nine, but the group “sang, ‘*La Carmagnole*’ to give them courage.” That is, these working women angrily rejected the Central Committee’s shunting them aside and were making sure the public took notice and understood their grievances.

These women’s actions indicate that they did not accept the idea that the Central Committee represented them without their input. In this case, the subjects publicly vented their frustration with the National Guard’s Central Committee, associated themselves with the war materiel of Paris – also marching in more-or-less military fashion – and planned to seize the national government. AC’s specific mention of an identifiable woman, although not necessarily identifiable by name, along with the

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<sup>29</sup> The desire of groups of women to march on Versailles was reiterated, and the 19 March demonstration received attention in newspapers, memoirs, and trial records. Having returned to France on 5 September 1870 with the declaration of the Republic, Victor Hugo buried the remains of his son, Charles, in Paris on 18 March, coinciding with the beginning of the Commune. Hugo left for Brussels shortly after, eventually saying he “supported the Commune in principle, but not in practice.”

specific details accompanying the sketch, point to his attempt to depict actual women, not merely represent the impression those women left on him. He never published his Commune-era work, leaving financial gain aside as a motive for possible caricatured exaggeration.<sup>30</sup> However, his consistent inclusion of larger breasts, buttocks, and the depiction of earrings on many subjects implies his desire to communicate that these subjects were, in fact, females, even if their actions or words did not immediately classify them as such. These communardes saw the cannons of Paris as significant to them, as women, as did the young woman adoring the “37 holes for 37 bullets” of the *mitrailleuse*, described in Chapter III. Similar to *La Matelassière*, at least some women like the “sleepwalker,” whose first and last names remain invisible in the historical record, held noteworthy status among other women and among male observers of the Commune era. The 19 March event was neither unique or the largest gathering of women wanting to deal with Versailles authorities directly.

A similar description arose from events occurring prior to the first meeting of the elected government of the Commune on 2 April. Women organized and announced a march to take on Versailles themselves, desiring to prevent bloodshed. Beatrix Œuvrie, *femme* Excoffons, later brought to trial as a “*pétroleuse*,” reiterated her memory of events in a letter to Louise Michel, later published as part of a number of women’s recollections.<sup>31</sup> Upon hearing of the organizational meeting from a woman neighbor,

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<sup>30</sup> AC was not alone in sketching events. A few scattered pieces – most not including women, as did AC’s – are extant. Although archives have not yet divulged her work, convicted communarde Elisabeth Rétiffe (Rétif), was a known cartoonist, who evidently spent time on the ramparts and elsewhere, drawing images.

<sup>31</sup> Louis Constant, *Mémoires de femmes, mémoire du peuple* (Paris: François Maspero, 1979), 92. *La Sociale*, 1 April 1871.

Œuvrie Excoffons told her mother she was going, “hugged [her] children and left.”<sup>32</sup> As with Malenfant Rouchy during the siege, the support of mothers and other women, especially in regard to childcare, was a significant factor in women’s ability to have an active, public presence. About 700-800 women began from Place de la Concorde in the VIII arrondissement, where Œuvrie Excoffons joined the march. Employing the collective memory of women’s roles in an earlier Revolution, some participants rallied others to their cause by invoking “the women [who] went to Versailles to take back the baker, the baker’s wife, and his *petit mitron*.”<sup>33</sup>

The *citoyenne* who had originally organized the march declined to go further, due to exhaustion, and the women designated Œuvrie Excoffons to lead them.<sup>34</sup> Her supporters lifted her up on a pool table, where she stated that she thought it would be better to organize to tend the wounded with the National Guard companies on the battlefield, as they were not numerous enough to prevail at Versailles at this time.<sup>35</sup> Other women agreed, and a few days later, twenty accompanied her to a particular unit at Neuilly, after receiving requested laissez-passers for their band from the *état major* of the National Guard.<sup>36</sup> Although ultimately not marching on Versailles, women organized, demonstrated, reorganized according to their perceived usefulness, and lobbied National Guard leaders for the passes necessary to perform ambulance work – all before the government had ever met. Women’s recorded experiences indicate they could not merely

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. Later, the “Les Femmes” section of *Le Cri du Peuple* for 4 & 6 April 1871 carried letters to “Citoyennes,” signed by a “*une véritable citoyenne*,” promoting marches to Versailles.

<sup>34</sup> Although I have no other details as far as this woman’s cause for exhaustion, many in Paris still suffered from the effects of the siege.

<sup>35</sup> Constant, *Mémoires de femmes*, 92-3.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 93.



be supporting an elected government or waiting for its decisions.

On 31 March, *La Sociale* first rolled off the presses, listing the XIV arrondissement's gendered calls for change, hopefully to be addressed by the new Commune electors when they met in a few days. Among the priorities were the abolition of prostitution in all its forms; free, secular, and national schools to replace religious instruction; and related to that, free and required instruction in all levels of education for both sexes.<sup>37</sup> For many women, including Louise Michel and the co-editor of *La Sociale*, André Léo, the relationship between ending prostitution and girls' and women's education, was substantial. Although in this case, unnamed, ungended members of the XIV arrondissement argued for these changes, Léo often wrote front-page editorials specifically addressing women's experiences and priorities.<sup>38</sup> During the Commune therefore, ending prostitution did not mean criminalizing and arresting its women participants, but rather, developing free education and creating alternate employment. As soon as an elected body existed, women lobbied for specific educational changes.

On 2 April, members of the Commune's government received the delegates of the Society of the New Education, with three women among its six representatives.<sup>39</sup> The Society's members had been elected the same day as the Commune's government – 26 March – with women among the electors. At least one of the delegates, Maria Verdure,

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<sup>37</sup> *La Sociale*, 31 March 1871.

<sup>38</sup> For a more extensive analysis of this point, see Carolyn Eichner's, "André Léo and the Subversion of Gender: the Battle over Women's Place," *Surmounting the Barricades*, 97-126.

<sup>39</sup> *La Sociale*, 3 April 1871. AC comments on a 23 April sketch, that the women delegates were first received on 23 April at 9AM. However, that day's meeting was designed for their submission of their program, identifying how goals would be accomplished. AC commented at the time, "The Commune is absolutely in favor of a radical reform in education." He then immediately segues to his decision, due to the "fair weather" to go "where [he] was fortunate to find women [on the gunboats] who agreed to pose for a little while." AN/AB XIX 3353/20.

also oversaw the reorganization of crèches during the Commune.<sup>40</sup> The Society, paralleling the desires of the XIV arrondissement, wanted reforms in education including an “immediate and radical” end to religious education, and education for both sexes, paid by taxation. They demanded mandatory, not optional, education, as a “right of all children, no matter their social status.”<sup>41</sup> The response to the Society’s request was full support by communard leadership. This description indicates the union of class and gendered interests as they dovetail in women’s educational interests and men’s understanding that education was crucial to the revolution. It also illuminates women’s roles as voting agents and as elected officials. Once the Commune’s government met, the formal, centralized reorganization of education began.

By 9 April, newspapers reported that siege-era desires to fully replace nuns and priests in the classroom could now be accomplished. Calls for “*citoyens et citoyennes*” to respond to employment offerings in the public primary schools abounded; educational changes and employment opportunities intersected.<sup>42</sup> All interested parties had to submit their requests for employment, along with references, to the Education Commission at the Hôtel de Ville. A post-siege article by A. Monnantruil in *Le Vengeur* had argued that “one of the causes of [the] disasters” during the siege was the fact that “17,776 religieux

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<sup>40</sup> *Journal Officiel de la Commune*, 2 April 1871. I have not yet found her listed in arrest or trial records. In 1870, 23 crèches, accommodating a mere 810 babies, existed in Paris, most associated with religious charities. Only in 1874 did the city council of Paris approve a measure encouraging municipal crèches, hoping to reduce infant mortality caused by wetnursing and bottle feeding. See, Rachel G. Fuchs, *Poor and Pregnant in Paris: Strategies for Survival in the Nineteenth Century* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 143. More research is needed, but it appears that communardes began to institute a secular reorganization of existing crèches into a larger, municipal service available to many more women. Due to the Commune’s brevity, a full reorganization and expansion did not occur. The Commune demands of working women and educational reformers may eventually be shown to have contributed both to the delay in municipal action after 1871 and to its eventual implementation of expanded crèche services.

<sup>41</sup> *La Sociale*, 3 April 1871.

<sup>42</sup> Entries for 9 April in *La Sociale*, *Le Cri du Peuple*, and AHG/Ly23/*Journal officiel*.

and 90,343 *religieuses*” filled the teaching and hospital jobs in the nation.<sup>43</sup> The Commune, evidently, was going to repair this educational, economic – and perhaps, patriotic – “disaster.” One of the executive commissions of the Commune specifically oversaw education for boys, girls, and adults. The roles of some women necessitated regular contact with other commissioners, including those in charge of *subsistance*, *travail et échange*, *services publics*, *sûreté générale*, and *administrations municipales et services publics*.<sup>44</sup> Other committees overseeing the military – including ambulances – and barricades, required women’s input and labor as well, with education often intersecting with employment. Those who shared Victorine Malenfant Rouchy’s beliefs that education for the popular classes was the key to economic, social, and political change had an audience during the Commune.

Malenfant Rouchy’s account does not focus only on women’s actions, but she indicates that women noticeably appeared at crucial symbolic and public moments during the life of the Commune, denying a male-only presence. By 3 April, when Versailles began its bombardment of Paris, she noted that 50,000 men had gathered to march, “*À Versailles!*” and that “a great number of women wanted to march in front of them.”<sup>45</sup> Although Œuvrie Excoffon’s late-March crowd of 700 women was smaller than the 50,000 men mentioned for 3 April, the women preceded the men in calling for a march on Versailles and presently desired to lead them. By participating in these large, public

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<sup>43</sup> *Le Vengeur* 10 February 1871.

<sup>44</sup> *Les 31 Séances Officielles de la Commune de Paris*, 46; *Le Cri du Peuple*, 31 March 1871. These are the Commune offices that appear to have received the most contact from women and who sought women’s input. However, all officers appear to have entered into discussions with women at some point or another, receiving their written or verbal input. Some also received pressure via the newspapers.

<sup>45</sup> Victorine Brocher, *Souvenirs d’une morte vivante* (Paris: François Maspero, 1977[1909]), 163.

events, women asserted public roles, adamantly negating male-only, even male-led military ventures meant to threaten, even attack, the Versailles seat of government. The fact men did not – or could not – remove women from that participation indicates tacit acceptance. Perhaps explaining this acceptance, the types of men now serving in military leadership also had changed with the Commune’s genesis.

Women’s greater direct access to political and military leadership was likely aided by the less-traditional makeup of that leadership. Watching a public funeral procession, Charlotte Ritchie reflected on changes in the military since the Commune. Describing a young man killed in battle, on 2 April Ritchie wrote, “the noble youth, carried to the grave with such pomp [during the Commune] was, a few weeks ago, an unknown butcher’s boy. The General on whose staff he served is Bergeret, an ex-street musician, who never having mounted a horse, commands the military movements from an open carriage.”<sup>46</sup> Lack of experience was also evident in the political realm. Implying that formal political experience was necessary to hold political office, a common criticism of the Commune was that so many of its officials were political “unknowns.” In that sense, women’s lack of formalized political experience often paralleled, not diverged from, men’s. As Ritchie’s comment demonstrates, that inexperience also exhibited itself in the Commune’s military ranks. Yet, experienced politicians and military leadership had recently lost the war with Prussia. Since political and military experience had not

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<sup>46</sup> Charlotte Ritchie, *A Memoir* (London: Spottiswoode & Co., 1879), 19. Jules Henri Marius Bergeret (1830-1905) was a captain in the National Guard and a Commune representative from the XX arrondissement. After 2 April, he was one of the Commune’s three military chiefs. Considering him insubordinate, he was replaced by Dombrowski and incarcerated by the Commune from 8-22 April. Although condemned to death in absentia in the Commune’s aftermath, he escaped to London, later living in New York.

resulted in victory, during the Commune a lack of experience – though certainly offering its own set of challenges – could not omit one from political and military participation. Therefore, even an unknown butcher's boy, street musician, or cook could participate.

Implying that ordinary working women could indeed hold political views, Ritchie worried over Félicie, her cook “who is not so brilliant in her political line as in her cooking.”<sup>47</sup> Ritchie was concerned over what she perceived to be the arbitrary arrests of anti-communardes. She wrote, “I beg and entreat [Félicie] not to say a word out of doors as I know of two people who were arrested in consequence of remarks they made in the street.”<sup>48</sup> Her concerns highlight her growing fears about the authority of this now-elected government, although she ends this letter by saying, “I trust a few days more will bring light and peace.”<sup>49</sup> Ultimately, Félicie was unlikely to be one targeted for arrest by communardes. However, Ritchie's comments reveal much about her own class status, revolutionary changes in leadership brought by the Commune, and her equation of Félicie's analysis as “political,” especially when asserted in public spaces. While Félicie had no formal political experience, she evidently expressed political views in the public and private spaces she occupied. Ritchie believed the political expressions of a domestic, as well as her peers, could elicit direct responses from Commune authorities, resulting in arrest. Domestic service had long provided a link between the public and private arenas of life; Commune events suggested a more pronounced union of those gendered arenas.

Domestic service occasionally situated some women to occupy the privileged

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<sup>47</sup> Ritchie, *A Memoir*, 19.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

spaces of Paris in unexpected ways, exerting a certain pressure on remaining bourgeoisie. As Fetridge described about early events, “all the inhabitants of the Place Vendome were obliged to leave their apartments in charge of domestics,” before being “turned out . . . at two hours notice on the 25th of March” – still before Commune officials took office.<sup>50</sup> This moment in the I arrondissement reveals a gendered component of middle-class fears. Women provided the bulk of domestic service in Paris. Still, in both English and French, the word used to universalize the term covering two sexes remains theoretically “ungendered,” meaning male-dominant. This universal hides the material reality of the term; in this case, the subject of concern is females, as their sex intersects with fears about the non-propertied classes. Therefore, when the world was “turned upside-down” during the Commune, the property that so defined middle-class males, in practice became the possession of those unable to hold it when the world is turned right-side up: working-class females. This threatening image did not necessarily represent the actual alliances of domestic laborers – as perhaps Félicie indicates – though the Place Vendôme held particular significance.

Physically occupying particular spaces, as well as the entire city, evinced political power. The Place Vendôme would later become the focus of one of the most memorable events of the Commune – the pulling down of the Vendôme Column.<sup>51</sup> Symbolic of Napoleonic military and political power, the Column represented everything the

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<sup>50</sup> William Pembroke Fetridge, *The Rise and Fall of the Commune of Paris in 1871; with a Full Account of the Bombardment, Capture, and Burning of the City* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1871), 82. How much force was brought to bear is unclear and many of the bourgeoisie left Paris of their own volition in the days following 18 March, some leaving domestics in charge of property in their absence.

<sup>51</sup> The decree for its toppling came on 13 April, with the event occurring on 16 May.

Commune was not – for better and worse. Whether by decree or simply in practice, the particular spaces communardes seized – Hôtel de Ville, Place Vendôme, Champs du Mars, the bridges and gates of Paris, churches – mattered. Additionally, although the Commune is especially associated with worker districts in the northeastern areas of the city, communardes occupied churches, *mairies*, barricades, and other posts throughout Paris. They also came from residences across the city, with arrests taking women from garrets in all arrondissements in the Commune’s aftermath.<sup>52</sup> Physical occupation of space held political significance. This is especially true if politics has more to do with the many means available to gain desired goals (*des pouvoirs*), rather than the limited definition accompanying the marking of a ballot (*le pouvoir*). Events at Le Madeleine in the VIII arrondissement – not far from Place Vendôme – roused Félicie’s sensibilities.

The Commune government and its supporters generally remained anti-clerical, but women of the popular classes also asserted their public input against acts they considered self-defeating – including seizure of some of “their” churches. By 7 April, the *curé* of La Madeleine had been arrested by communardes, although the government did not officially requisition the church until 19 May.<sup>53</sup> Though Le Madeleine was not the closest church to the Ritchie household, it was nearby and Félicie appears to have

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<sup>52</sup> Trial, pardon, and police records indicate women arrested in all arrondissements, although not at the same rates. Whether women living in the IV, XI, XII, XIII, XVIII, XIX, and XX arrondissements – from which more arrestees appear to have been taken – were more involved in the Commune or whether police assumed them to be, remains undetermined. With the exception of the XIII, these arrondissements saw the most sustained resistance to Versaillais troops as communardes retreated southwest to northeast across the city. Residents of these arrondissements may very well have provided the bulk of that resistance. However, residents from arrondissements that were perceived to be less “agitated” may have also been less likely to be discovered or accused. Malenfant Rouchy, residing in the VII, serves as an example of this possibility.

<sup>53</sup> Fontoulieu, *Les Eglise de Paris*, 348-9. Chapter III includes an assessment of women’s involvement in 19 May events at La Madeleine.

regularly attended. According to Ritchie, Félicie's "politics waver[ed] with every wind that bl[ew], ha[ving] entirely come over to the side of order since the *arrestation* of the good *Curé de la Madeleine*" in early April. (Italics in original)<sup>54</sup> Earlier, Félicie had "protested that the good *peuple* could mean no harm," but now became ill with her comings and goings into the public realm.<sup>55</sup> Prioritizing "the side of order," Ritchie – a non-Catholic – understood secularization of the city's churches as a disorderly act that increased fear among some residents. Félicie, while aligning with Ritchie in this case, appears to have been motivated by her personal association with this particular curé, rather than a generalized antagonism towards church requisitioning. It does not appear that Félicie participated in the anti-seizure demonstration at Le Madeleine, discussed in Chapter III. However, women's participation in and protests against these informal and formal seizures of property, as well as Félicie's changes of mind, indicate many women's consistent awareness of, presence in, and effects on revolutionary political events. During the Commune, marriage also became a political event.

The politics of secular marriage, divorce, and domestic partnerships reveal the effects of anti-clericalism in the intimate lives of communardes. Malvina Souville Blanchecotte noted changes in marriage in two letters dated 26 April. She marked that day as "the time when the Commune came to decree that, in order to contract marriages, one only needed to come together, man and woman, and say '*Je la veux, Je le veux*' and the Mayor only has to answer, '*J'y consens.*'"<sup>56</sup> This decree and minimalist civil

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<sup>54</sup> Ritchie, *A Memoir*, 21.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>56</sup> Blanchecotte, *Tablettes*, 89.



ceremony contrasted sharply with the religious and social marriage requirements, to which the non-propertied classes already resisted, and from which women, in particular, did not benefit. Commune marriages form the subject of an undated painting by Félix Guérie, entitled, “*Un mariage sur la Commune*,” presently at the Musée d’art et d’histoire de Saint-Denis.<sup>57</sup> In this painting, the wine jug and weapons scattered everywhere indicate the artist did not believe these marriages were “civil,” in more ways than one. Léonce Schérer likewise depicted secular marriage, aiming to show the scurrilous, sexist reasoning among Commune men.<sup>58</sup> He did not draw his images from the perspectives of working women, many of whom already lived outside the realm of church-sanctioned marriage. Even limited access to divorce did not become legal in France until 1884.<sup>59</sup> However, on 5 April 1871, *La Sociale* indicated under the section labeled, “*Dépêches et Nouvelles*,” that “the question of divorce must be quickly studied by the Commune,” likely not endearing those of Guérie’s persuasions.<sup>60</sup> Perhaps mirroring the views of earlier feminist, Jenny d’Hericourt, those active in producing Commune discourse saw “equality for women in marriage [and] the right to divorce” among the priorities of the new social order.<sup>61</sup>

Reflecting a distant precursor to domestic partnerships, newspapers reported women’s ability to claim National Guard benefits, whether or not married to their Guard

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<sup>57</sup> MSD/ Félix Guérie, huile sur toile, *Un mariage sue la Commune* (s.d., fin du XIX siècle).

<sup>58</sup> NWU/Siege and Commune of Paris/Schérer/Souvenirs de la Commune, 9.

<sup>59</sup> While granted in 1792, divorce had been abolished in 1816, remaining illegal in any form until 1884.

<sup>60</sup> *La Sociale*, 5 April 1871.

<sup>61</sup> Jenny d’Hericourt (1809-1875) added that in addition to equality in marriage, divorce, and access to education as prerequisites for the vote, “woman must not claim her rights as woman but only as a human person and member of the social body.” Cited in Gisela Bock’s, *Women in European History*, trans., Allison Brown (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 92. Hericourt lived in the United States from 1863-1873, participating in the Women’s Rights movement.

partner. According to *La Social*, women could claim their partners' National Guard benefits, whether "*maris, époux à vie ou à terme, à poste fixé ou provisoire,*" serving the *drapeau rouge*.<sup>62</sup> Souville Blanchecotte verified in her letters of 26 April that a decree benefited "the widows of *fédérés*, dead in the line of duty, whether legally married or not."<sup>63</sup> Even if not married by church or municipal authority, women associated through their actions and labor with a Guard could claim a pension. Trial and pardon records indicate more than a dozen women whose appellations associated them with men to whom they were not married. Though all but one list the woman as *dite*, followed by their chosen last name, Clotilde Vallet, *veuve* Legros is consistently listed as "*dite femme* Gandon."<sup>64</sup> Her title illuminates her twelve-year association with René Marie Gandon, with whom she had two children. Many more were unmarried to their present partners but apparently were not known by their partner's last name.

Lists delineating National Guard beneficiaries do not separate domestic partners from married ones, disallowing a clear view of how women categorized themselves; additionally, the Commune's abbreviated tenure also clouds a clear picture of how claims were handled. Lists include valuable information about ordinary working women, many noted as day laborers, laundresses, or cleaning women. Women's birth names are enumerated in the far left column, with "*noms des gardes,*" listed alongside. As Vallet Gandon's name indicates, assuming that a woman listed as the wife of a Guard was considered so in legal terms is problematic, even when the term, "*femme*" was employed.

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<sup>62</sup> *La Sociale*, 5 April 1871.

<sup>63</sup> Blanchecotte, *Tablettes*, 89.

<sup>64</sup> AN/BB24/756/Demande en Grâce de Vallet, Vve Legros, dite femme Gandon. AHG/Ly23/26<sup>e</sup> Conseil de Guerre/Vallet Legros, dite femme Gandon.

Many of these lists wound up in police custody, with some women apparently arrested as a result.<sup>65</sup> Commune discourse, and evidently, practice, reflected the realities of working people's lives. Many women of the popular classes could remain legally independent of their domestic partners, even if an association on beneficiary rolls made them eventually vulnerable to police scrutiny.

The beneficiary decree benefited women as individuals, not primarily as wives, daughters, or mothers – though certainly parental responsibilities were of material concern. Their “feminist” economic considerations were individualistic – though relationships were relevant – forcing changes in social and legal protocols. If a Guard were killed, the pension was supposed to be 600 francs, with a benefit to each child of 365 francs, paid in twelve installments, whether the child was “*reconnus ou non*.”<sup>66</sup> If a mother did not exist – *reconnus ou non* – under the new order of the Commune, a child was also to receive “*l'éducation intégrale nécessaire pour être en mesure de se suffire dans la société*.”<sup>67</sup> The Commune recognized relationships differently than had prior (and later) governments. It determined that economic and educational benefits for all women and children aided – and were therefore the responsibility of – the Commune society at large. Individuals entered relationships; relationships did not necessarily define individuals.

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<sup>65</sup> APP/Ba368/pf4. Presently my records include only lists from the I<sup>e</sup> arrondissement, 13<sup>e</sup> Bataillon, 3<sup>e</sup> Compagnie and the XI<sup>e</sup> arrondissement, 237<sup>e</sup> Bataillon, 6<sup>e</sup> Compagnie, though about 400 names appear on these lists alone. Notations among this incomplete, even sketchy, set of records so far suggest about a dozen women whose arrests appear to be linked directly to information gleaned from National Guard beneficiary listings containing resident addresses, though certainly more may have been affected. In these cases, all were later released.

<sup>66</sup> NWU/Mairie du XIII arrondissement/10 avril 1871.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

Noticing communarde discourse and experiences suggests a moment when experiments in implementing equality took a practical, individualist turn. However, relational, not individualist, approaches to women's citizenship and social equality became discursively dominant in France, especially after the Commune. Attempting to divide women's material experience or political priorities into relational *or* individualistic categories limits, perhaps unexpectedly, the ability to see the fullness of the individuality expressed.<sup>68</sup> Critiques of individualist feminist arguments for civil rights have situated them as ultimately weaker, given the perception they rest in male-based definitions of the individual and corresponding rights. This, therefore, created the paradox within women's arguments for citizenship: they were not male, therefore not individuals; if not individuals, they could not be citizens. To get around this, women argued their relationships within the home and with men allowed them entrance to citizenship precisely because they had something unique to offer – even if that unique something simultaneously implied they were not equals. Working women's experiences, however, did not indicate they were unequal to the task of full participation; additionally, Commune discourse indicated individual civil rights could encompass, not exclude, women's experiences.

Léo's reference to women's involvement since 18 March and her point that revolution was a human, not male, responsibility expressly devalued any definitions of political equality that implied sex differentials. Victorine Malenfant Rouchy clearly saw

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<sup>68</sup> Karen Offen, "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 14, No. 1 (1988): 119-152. For Responses from Ellen Carol Dubois and Nancy Cott, and Karen Offen's responses to both, see, "Comment and Reply," in *Signs* 15, No. 1 (1989): 195-209.

herself as an individual, even a republican citizen in her case, who also had a mother, children, and at times, a husband. She employed what are now termed relational and individualist discourses in describing her efforts. Her description of her experiences, however, shows her relational considerations did not form the crux of her argument that a citizen had right to serve in an ambulance brigade. The default for the individualistic/relational division has often been a woman's familial association, which most men also have. If a woman was in any way responsible for the care of family members (even broadly defined), her feminist arguments during the nineteenth century have often appeared to prioritize her relational concerns. This creates an analytical conundrum in which an "individual" female can not consider her full economic and social status (as a parent, as a caretaker for an aged relative, etc.) when determining her politics, without denying her political, rights-based individuality. This conundrum exists because the basis of definitions of the "universal" individual remains male. However, Kathleen Jones' social theory of a "woman-centered polity," indicates that redefining (not reducing) individual rights to include women's experiences expands definitions, while retaining male access to citizenship.<sup>69</sup>

In the case of National Guard benefits, the lack of stipulation for either marriage or children in order to claim benefits indicates an individual-based statement. This is the case, even if the money could also aid the survival of children. Some communardes were also wives, daughters of National Guards, and parents; their claim to Guard pensions,

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<sup>69</sup> Parallels exist in the movement for civil rights for people of color within the United States. Early definitions of citizen included land-ownership, money, and often, literacy, conditions that few African Americans could meet, even after the 15<sup>th</sup> amendment was ratified. Expanding definitions of terms has not denied privileged white males their citizenship, but eventually worked to include a larger group of people within the definition of the term, citizen.

however, rested in their self-stated economic, perhaps intimate, partnership with a Guard. Forming a voluntary economic partnership with another individual – if both are male – does not negate individuality. Individualist motivations and status do not have to become invisible when at least one partner is female. Men likely enrolled in the National Guard and participated in the Commune for many reasons, including economic ones. Many had wives and children. Yet they have not been analyzed as being “relational” revolutionaries or engaging in “relational” politics, except perhaps as they were “related” to the working classes.<sup>70</sup> Women’s Guard pay was equal to men’s and, like men, they were to receive the same pay whether or not they were also married or parents. For communardes, this revolution finally reflected the quotidian realities of their individual lives.

Representing women’s economic interests and perhaps the most-effective Commune organization, was the Union of Women for the Defense of Paris and Aid to the Wounded. It officially declared its existence and purpose on 11 and 12 April 1871.<sup>71</sup> Early articles by Eugene Schulkind and chapters in Carolyn Eichner’s, *Surmounting the Barricades*, analyze the structure, goals, and efficacy of the Union of Women in representing women’s interests.<sup>72</sup> Disassociating itself from clubs as well as

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<sup>70</sup> I have found no accounts of the Commune indicating men participated primarily for family reasons – whether or not they did. Descriptions of women’s involvement, however – including Edith Thomas’ – regularly associate women with husbands, fathers, or sons, whom they supposedly followed to the front lines, due to their familial, rather than revolutionary, devotion. My point here is to reveal the gendered differences in the contemporary and subsequent analysis, not to suggest that no women or men participated due to relational considerations.

<sup>71</sup> *Journal Officiel*, 11 April 1871; the public announcement appeared on 12 April 1871. *Murailles*, II, 258.

<sup>72</sup> See, Eugene Schulkind, “Le Role des femmes dans la Commune de 1871,” *1848: Revue des révolutions contemporaines* XLII, 185 (February 1950) and “Socialist Women During the 1871 Paris Commune,” *Past and Present* 106 (February 1985): 124-163 and Carolyn Eichner’s, *Surmounting the Barricades* for the most recent assessment of the *Union des femmes*, in this case as significant in organizing and promoting

neighborhood Vigilance Committees, the Union formalized the connections between women's participation in the revolution – especially their need for work – with the governing bodies of the Commune. In particular, the Commission on Labor and Exchange, with Léo Fränkel as its leader, served as the link. The Central Committee of the Union oversaw a Committee from each arrondissement, with each arrondissement attempting to register women for work and matching them with jobs.<sup>73</sup> Every arrondissement registered a committee and met at least once.

Women's formation of a(nother) Central Committee highlights that women did not necessarily feel represented by the Commune's governing Central Committee – for which none of them could vote. The group's title specifically promoted women as agents of the city's defense and aid to the wounded, officially linking women to the public sphere. The Commune's Central Committee did not create the Union of Women; the Union of Women integrated the needs of women with Central Committee goals. For example, Union leadership accepted donations for supplying widows and children with the necessities of living as it encouraged donations of materials necessary for creating military uniforms and providing for ambulances in the city and on the battlefield.<sup>74</sup> These donations overlapped the public and private realms of women, simultaneously aiding private households and public military and municipal needs. Municipal offices

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aspects of feminist socialism. Eichner argues that Dmitrieff understood that, "without specific and continuous pressure from feminists, gender-related issues would hardly be addressed." For Dmitrieff, the Union's instigator, the revolution had to succeed in order for women to gain economic and social independence, as Eichner appropriately concludes. Eichner, *Surmounting the Barricades*, 73.

<sup>73</sup> AHG/Ly 22/Commune Sociale de Paris – Union des femmes.

<sup>74</sup> The experiences of Juliette Lamber Adam, Geneviève Bréton, and Charlotte Ritchie, among others, indicate that the Union was far from the only distributor of these materials, though, had the Commune lasted longer, the Union might have centralized distribution further.

were open each day from 8AM into the evening, serving as gendered intersections of otherwise private and public worlds. The Union's manifest was not formally published until 6 May after an anonymous group of *citoyenne* "*reactionnaires*" published their conservative preferences, to which Union leadership felt compelled to respond.<sup>75</sup>

Nonetheless, their centralized purpose and structure – uniting women's needs, skills, and demands with Commune discourse and goals – were clear from its inception. Elisabeth Dmitrieff, the Union's leader, but only one among the Central Committee's administrators, understood the need for political pressure represented in numerical and rhetorical strength.

The Union served as one means of formalizing women's political access to the elected government. The Union of Women served as a political action committee of sorts, with its centralized organization – including stationery, stamps, membership lists, accounting records, and access to the Commune's Central Committee – creating neighborhood conduits from and to its own Central Committee. The Union's surviving records reveal the prioritization of women's needs as strongly relevant to the conduct of the Commune. Its instigator, Dmitrieff, argued that the Commune "should be simultaneously engaged in taking into account the just demands of the entire population, without distinction of sex, a distinction created and maintained by the need for antagonism on which the privileges of the governing classes rest."<sup>76</sup> Dmitrieff added that

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<sup>75</sup> Published version in *Murailles*, II, 440; Newspaper version in *Le Cri du Peuple*, 10 Mai 1871; Handwritten version, AHG/Ly 22/Manifeste du comité Central de l'union des femmes pour la défense de Paris et le soins aux blessés.

<sup>76</sup> "Adresse des citoyennes," *Journal officiel*, April 14, 1871. Carolyn Eichner considers this type of argument an example of a "feminist socialism." However, I suggest that it is more appropriately assigned to a materialist feminism category, in which the dichotomous sex categories of male and female (not



ending female-male competition was a prerequisite for ending labor-capitalist disputes, extending Marxist analysis in a way Flora Tristan had suggested prior to Marx's fame.<sup>77</sup>

Not all women who enrolled in the Union's arrondissement enlistments necessarily followed Dmitrieff's Marxist-feminist reasoning, but the large enrollments lent influence to the Union's Central Committee. Not strictly associated with the clubs, the Union of Women nonetheless used club environments as a means of spreading information, strengthening their support, and enrolling women for employment.

The Union's leadership employed a range of rhetoric in their attempts to rally women's support for their efforts and for the Commune. This was especially the case at its first large meeting in St-Germain l'Auxerrois in the I arrondissement. According to Fontoulieu, this church did not see formal requisitioning until 29 April, but women regularly occupied it after 11 April.<sup>78</sup> Malvina Souville Blanchecotte was not a member of the Union nor did she ever register for their assistance, but she took note of the Union's formal beginnings in mid-April. Souville Blanchecotte joined women gathering and filing into rows of St-Germain l'Auxerrois.<sup>79</sup> Describing a speaker's words, she quoted, "I call on the mothers, the sisters, the daughters, the wives no matter their

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differences in anatomy) are deemed as socially constructed as a means to oppress those in one category: female. For parallels revealing the use of categories of "race" as tools of oppression, see, Barbara Jeanne Fields, "Slavery, Race and Ideology in the United States of America," *New Left Review*, No. 181 (May/June 1990): 95-118. For materialist feminist analysis of the overlap between categories of sex and race, see, Colette Guillaumin, *Racism, Sexism, Power, and Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>77</sup> AHG/Ly22/Adresse du Comité Central (de l'Union des femmes). Flora Tristan (1803-1844), the first known to call for an international association of workers, was also among the first to center women's experiences in any program bent on working-class reform. Tristan, *The Workers' Union*, trans. Beverly Livingston (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), vii.

<sup>78</sup> Paul Fontoulieu, *Les Eglises de Paris sous la Commune* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1873), 182. St-Germain l'Auxerrois is frequently associated with the Union of Women, although whether this was a formal association or a result of overlapping interests and attendees, remains unclear.

<sup>79</sup> Blanchecotte, *Tablettes*, 49.

politics” to fight with the fathers, brothers, and sons in avoiding “national suicide.”<sup>80</sup> The speaker, likely a member of the Union’s leadership, exposes her perception that women practiced politics and regularly expressed a wide range of political views. Souville Blanchecotte added that she agreed with the speaker, adding that these situations are always “worse for us women.”<sup>81</sup> Souville Blanchecotte’s comment suggests that although she had no “fathers, brothers, and sons” fighting in the Commune, the speaker’s relational rhetoric nonetheless had the effect of drawing in all listeners, whatever their actual relationship with a male or the Commune. Her statement, while not implying Souville Blanchecotte’s alliance with the Union – or Dmitrieff’s politics – situates her understanding of women’s gendered challenges in local and national events. Some women’s association with the Union was overt – and troublesome for them in the wake of the Commune.

Nathalie Duval LeMel’s police interrogation after her June 1871 arrest divulges her admission that she “took part in the Central Committee of Women,” as the Commune had “charged [her] with organizing women’s work.”<sup>82</sup> This she did until “the moment when the army of Versailles entered Paris.” In that capacity, she had spoken at “various women’s clubs including, [the ones at] St-Germain l’Auxerrois, Notre-Dame de la Croix, and la Trinité.”<sup>83</sup> The locations of these churches, located in the I, XX, and IV, respectively, also indicate the geography Duval LeMel admits to covering. This situation also implies that the Union’s leadership had direct contact with club women, hearing their

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>82</sup> AHG/Ly 23/688, dossier Duval LeMel, Procès Verbal, 21 June 1871.

<sup>83</sup> AHG/Ly 23/688, dossier Duval LeMel, Rapport sur l’affaire de la nommée Duval, 20 Juin 1872.

arguments at meetings, whether or not the analysis of the Union's leadership and that of club women generally coalesced. Convincing women to sign up, as Duval LeMel did, also meant that the Union's representatives had to understand, and argue for, the priorities of those women in attendance.<sup>84</sup> In that sense, the Union represented club women's interests to the Commune's Central Committee as they organized work for those women.

Organized work for women – in ateliers and at home – ultimately provided the dominant focus for the Union and their communication with the Commune's government. In a letter from the Union of Women to the Commune's Commission of Labor and Exchange, leadership argued for an end to “the exploitation and enslavement of Labor by Capital,” hoping to “facilitate urgently-needed reforms, in production and producer relationships.”<sup>85</sup> They identified three points that must be addressed, including: a variety of work in each trade, as repetitive movement “damages mind and body”; reduction in work hours, as physical exhaustion “destroys spiritual qualities”; and an “end to all competition between male and female workers” as their “interests are identical and their solidarity is essential” to the overall goals enunciated above.<sup>86</sup> Above all, the letter declares that, “the reorganization of women's work is an extremely urgent matter, when one considers that in the past society, it was the most exploited form of all.” As such, the Union desired as one of its requisites, women's equal pay with men for equal hours of

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<sup>84</sup> My accounting reveals hundreds of names from these enrolments, although only (likely incomplete) lists from the II, VII, X, XI, and XIII arrondissements appear to remain in archival records.

<sup>85</sup> AHG/Ly23/pp1 from letter from the Union des Femmes pour la défense de Paris, addressed du Comité Central de l'Union des femmes à la Commission de travail et d'échange. As Eichner argues, Central Committee declarations bear Elisabeth Dmitrieff's feminist-Marxist imprint.

<sup>86</sup> AHG/Ly23/pp2 from letter from the Union des Femmes pour la défense de Paris, addressed du Comité Central de l'Union des femmes à la Commission de travail et d'échange.

work. This letter goes on to list twenty-seven “crafts mainly practiced by women,” noting that organizers hoped to reopen workshops and factories closed in the absence of the bourgeoisie, for the benefit of women.<sup>87</sup> These crafts also reflect women’s stated professions on Union of Women arrondissement registration lists.<sup>88</sup> Women’s labor was the priority, reminding communards how central women’s labor was, not only to the economy, but also to the revolution, in which they were now engaged.

In another letter, in which the Union set forth its proposed organizational plan, leadership reminded Commune office-holders of women’s significance to the revolution ever since its inception on 18 March. Arguing for immediate groupings of workers for production, the statement says, “it can be expected that the groups will form quickly, as the women have, ever since 18 March, demonstrated the extent of their dedication through their great sacrifices.”<sup>89</sup> The letter adamantly adds that this will not mean “women doing futile and unproductive work.” Rather, they seek the production of “marketable items, hav[ing] immediate value and easily sold,” which will also contribute to the opening of shops.<sup>90</sup> Their proposal for the organization of women’s producer cooperatives, which went through much editing before publication, promotes the

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<sup>87</sup> AHG/Ly23/pp3 from letter from the Union des Femmes pour la défense de Paris, addressed du Comité Central de l’Union des femmes à la Commission de travail et d’échange. These crafts include, brush-making, haberdashery, embroidery, assembly work on umbrellas, straw hats, banners, and flags, fan-making, coloring, glass pearl blowing, button-making, undergarments, bookbinding, kennel-work, corset-making, waistcoat-making, tie-making, bandage-making, flower-making and plumes, trimmings for clothing (*passementerie*), cap-making, illuminating, type-setting, pasteboard items, millinery, book-stitching, laundry, porcelain-painting, wreath-making, and doll-dressing.

<sup>88</sup> AHG/Ly22/ Lists for II, VII, X, XI, and XIII arrondissements. The Republic’s official *Enquête* determined that the “profession” of 246 of the 1,051 women tried on charges relevant to the Commune as of February 1872 was that of prostitute, although no women registered as such on the roles of the Union of Women. Assemblée Nationale, *Enquête parlementaire sur l’Insurrection du 18 Mars*, Tome III, 309.

<sup>89</sup> AHG/Ly22/Letter titled, “Travail des Femmes – Plan d’organisation.”

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

association between the Revolution of 18 March and women's status. It demands that, "the Commune must complete the partial victory of *le peuple*, not by limiting itself to the urgent needs of military defense but by starting unequivocally on the pathway of social reform."<sup>91</sup> For the Central Committee representing the city's disenfranchised working women, social reform was as important to the Commune as military defense. The writers then connect that point with a plan to open, in each *arrondissement*, a unit to receive raw materials, which then can be distributed to individual women or groups of women, for production. The Commune's governing body supported this plan with rhetoric and with money.

A bill for services rendered demonstrates the role the Union played as the intermediary between women laborers and the Commune governing body. Dated 26 April 1871 and stamped with the association's name, a bill from the *Association pour l'organisation du Travail des Femmes* – a component of the Union – requested payment for the production of military clothing.<sup>92</sup> It delineates four groups of items delivered to the 8<sup>th</sup> Legion of the National Guard, including,

Officers' sabres with waistbands and sword-knots	6@	35 f/each	210 f
Képis	6@	10 f/each	60 f
Boots	6@	28 f/each	168 f
Pants	6@	20 f/each	120 f
TOTAL			558 f

<sup>91</sup> AHG/Ly23/Projet d'organisation pour le travail des femmes. A good portion of the draft is crossed out, revealing the refinement of the editing process. However, it is clear that the authors wanted to associate the centrality of women as proletariats with the political aspects of the Commune.

<sup>92</sup> AHG/Ly22/Association internationale pour le travail des Femmes, "Livré." Although the Union's name does not appear here and the organizational name at the top of the billing changes among documents, these represent the work of those in the *Union des femmes*. My understanding is that the Union served as a rubric under which work for women, ambulance recruitment, and solicitations for women and children were conducted, thereby leading these various components to employ variations on titles that do not always immediately reflect their association with the *Union des femmes*.

Another bill requests payment for six more *sabres d'officiers* furnished to the same legion of the National Guard.<sup>93</sup> Similar to Victorine Malenfant Rouchy's experience during the siege, women's work was distributed so that more women could work, receiving at least a small wage. The hope was that in the future, work could be distributed to all individual women who wanted it, allowing all women to support themselves and their dependants.<sup>94</sup> Even those *Versillais* representatives compiling the formal *Enquête* about events proceeding from 18 March, noted that in interviews, women "showed thankfulness towards the Commune which gave them money and power."<sup>95</sup> The Union of Women for the Defense of Paris and Aid to the Wounded served those women's needs, submitting bills for services rendered to the Commune. Women's priorities did not merely support political and military goals; they altered them.

Between 12 April and 17 May, the Central Committee of the Union of Women developed itself as the most significant venue for organizing women's labor, although that was still not its only purview. In the published statutes of 12 April, the Union, formally led by Mmes LeMel, Dmitrieff, Leloup, Lefèvre, Jacquier, Collin, and Jarry, asserted its two priorities as equal pay (with men) for women and schools for girls in which the female teachers would be paid the same as male teachers.<sup>96</sup> By 16 April, committee members demanded in newspapers that each *marie* give a room to their cause

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<sup>93</sup> AHG/Ly22/Association pour l'organisation du travail des Femmes, "Fourni."

<sup>94</sup> Wording commonly reflecting a priority of individual women and their dependents, rather than women as wives, mothers, or daughters, indicates a woman-focused, individualist perception of women's economic situation.

<sup>95</sup> Assemblée Nationale's *Enquête*, Tome III, 313.

<sup>96</sup> *Journal Officiel*, 14 April 1871.

so that women might permanently and publicly meet.<sup>97</sup> These demands required that the arrondissement pay for any *affiches* that the Committees might find necessary to produce.<sup>98</sup> Eight women – all with the designation of *ouvrière* after their name – signed the published letter. By 27 April, the committee in the IV arrondissement called for their eleventh meeting at the *école primaire des filles, à Montrouge*, although meeting announcements appeared regularly in arrondissements by the end of April.<sup>99</sup> Elisabeth Dmitrieff sought exclusivity for the Union as the representative organization of women but overlap between Union goals and practices, and those represented in clubs and elsewhere denied the Union that status.

Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois in the I arrondissement became a site much associated with non-Union women's clubs, as well as the Union of Women; at times, women's interests are clearer than who has organized efforts. By 6 May, the eighteenth public evening meeting of apparently non-Union *citoyennes* at this location occurred, meaning that a club not officially associated with the Union of Women had occupied this site since at least 19 April.<sup>100</sup> Therefore, Union and non-Union women (though certainly some overlap existed) had occupied Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois days, perhaps weeks, before the Commune military government requisitioned it on 29 April. The 6 May announcement includes an addendum stating that, "*citoyens* are [also] admitted."<sup>101</sup> In this case,

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<sup>97</sup> *Le Cri du Peuple*, 16 Avril 1871, "Adresses des Citoyennes à la Commission Exécutive de la Commune de Paris."

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> *Le Cri du peuple*, 27 Avril 1871. See also under "Avis Divers" for *Le Cri du Peuple*, 26, 28, and 29 April, as well as *La Sociale* for same dates.

<sup>100</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris Collection/1352-X (MP-XIV), XIV-20. *Journal Officiel*, 15 Mai 1871. The signatures below announcements sometimes indicate whether the meetings were Union-sponsored.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

*citoyennes* universalized themselves, gendering – and therefore limiting – the term, *citoyens*. In this call to *citoyennes*, continued enlistments for ambulances and *fourneaux* provide the rhetorical focus, indicating the ongoing need for women’s services and employment in sustaining the Commune, with daily work registry hours included. It also informed women that donations in kind and money, aiding the wounded, widows, and orphans would also be accepted, telling readers where to deliver them. While identical to Union goals and operations, the title and leadership of that organization appear nowhere on these announcements. Whether the Union was so prominent that appellations were considered unnecessary at times or whether Dmitrieff’s goal of full centralization simply was impossible and these women were acting independently remains unclear. In any event, women’s meetings often addressed identical goals, even if the “caliber” of women in attendance offended some observers.

Working women’s appearance could indicate danger, especially when they overturned men’s laws. At the meeting at St-Germain l’Auxerrois that Fontoulieu visited, about 500 people attended, of which about 100 were women, according to his count. Fontoulieu expressed concern that, “a large part [of the women] smoked cigarettes (the president was smoking a pipe).”<sup>102</sup> At the IV arrondissement’s La Trinité on 12 May, he commented on the distinct majority of women and young girls in attendance, noting that “most of them were smoking cigarettes,” finding it “unnecessary, after saying that, to mention which class they came from.”<sup>103</sup> Some women of the popular classes

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<sup>102</sup> Fontoulieu, *Les Églises de Paris sous la Commune*, 183.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 271. Here he mentions the participation of Nathalie Lemel, who corroborated her presence at La Trinité in interviews with police and at her trial.



certainly smoked and photographs taken of communardes depict some with cigarettes, even cigars, in their hands. (Figure 4.1 and 4.2)<sup>104</sup> Therefore, this description seems reasonable, if perhaps shocking for Fontoulieu. In this milieu, one “*marchande à la toilette*” from the rue de l’Arbre-Sec adjacent to St Germain l’Auxerrois, demanded complete freedom for women, and a *cantinière des Vengeurs de Paris* proposed a decree in favor of divorce.”<sup>105</sup> Fontoulieu and the women themselves, as Souville Blanchecotte had also attested, linked their “complete freedom” with the ability to divorce. Fontoulieu added smoking into the equation. Freedom to smoke and freedom to divorce implied “complete freedom” for these women, upending social and legal norms. The location of these comments also suggests that Union of Women officials and their discourse about labor organization did not fully control events at sites associated with Union endeavors.

This scene also makes public the fact that, even when possibly only one-fifth of club attendees were women – many evidently smoking and of the working classes – they effectually engaged in aspects of direct democracy. The *marchande*’s motion was adopted with enthusiasm, and a delegation, “composed of four women [only], was named right away, to take the pledge, formulated by the assembly, to *Citoyen* Protot [serving on the Commune’s Commission of Justice] the next day.”<sup>106</sup> As *La Sociale* had suggested

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<sup>104</sup> For two examples of photos of communardes smoking, see NWU/Siege of Paris Collection/”Hortense David”; available from <http://www.library.northwestern.edu/spec/siege/docs/PAR00672.html> ; Internet; accessed 17 July 2005; and “Christine d’Argent” (spelled in photo collection as Dargent); available from <http://www.library.northwestern.edu/spec/siege/docs/PAR01214.html> ; Internet; accessed on 17 July 2005. For communards later imprisoned, their requests for tobacco in letters prior to visits of family or friends are ubiquitous, indicating high rates of addiction among them. Certainly tobacco as an exchange commodity in prison could have been a factor. Likely, the influence of colonial and American tobacco affected women similarly when fewer restraints on their behavior were enforced.

<sup>105</sup> Fontoulieu, *Les Églises de Paris sous la Commune*, 184.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid. Eugène Protot (1839-1921), was elected to the Commune from the XI arrondissement. Wounded during Bloody Week, he hid with the aid of others, escaping Paris with false documents in October 1871.

the Commune study the legalization of divorce on 5 April, and the government had made marriages civil affairs as of a few days before this meeting of 29 April, these events ring true.<sup>107</sup> The hand-delivered declaration – resulting from spontaneous discussion, mutual agreement among club participants, and creation of a delegation of women only – exerted pressure on Commune leaders.<sup>108</sup> Although Saint-Germain l’Auxerrois has generally been associated with the Union of Women, not all women in later Union-associated venues waited for formal approval of their political acts from any Central Committee.

Some women had not waited for the Union’s formal establishment on 11 April to initiate organized political pressure; others never mentioned their centralized affiliations, if they had any. Prior to the Union’s organization, “the *citoyennes* of the XIII arrondissement, represented by, Louise Leroy, Tardif, Antoinnette Decroix, Petit, [and] Cols” published an official “protest” under the “*Les Femmes*” section of a newspaper.<sup>109</sup> They railed against those they termed, “*lâches*, who . . . are not content only to hide” from service, but put the lives of their brothers at risk.<sup>110</sup> Even after the development of the Union, announcements from “the *citoyennes* of Montmartre,” calling for meetings, did not mention the Union of Women or Vigilance Committees by name.<sup>111</sup> On 2 May, a committee in the XVII arrondissement made a call to “*patriotes citoyennes*” for service aiding in the ambulances on the battlefields and barricades, without ever mentioning the

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<sup>107</sup> *La Sociale*, 5 April 1871.

<sup>108</sup> The effectiveness of each petition or other political pressure tactic is often unclear due to inconsistent records, but also, the brevity of the Commune. Nonetheless, women’s attempts to contribute their political influence are evident.

<sup>109</sup> *Le Cri du Peuple*, 7 Avril 1871, “Les Femmes.”

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> *Le Cri du Peuple*, 26 Avril 1871.

Union.<sup>112</sup> Although Dmitrieff demanded allegiance from members, women often served their own interests, at times associating themselves simultaneously with the Union and other groups. Quite likely, this situation also suggests that the Union was served by calls associated with the needs and patriotism of their audience more generally, rather than an association with the Union in particular – although Dmitrieff did not see it that way. André Léo's response to her signature on that non-Union 2 May call perhaps speaks to a larger spectrum of some women's gendered revolutionary consciousness and effectiveness.

André Léo's signature on a non-Union announcement published by *citoyennes* in the XVII arrondissement aligned her with all women desiring revolutionary change. The 2 May call from the "*Comité des citoyennes du XVII<sup>e</sup> arrondissement*," reveals Léo as the first signatory, a situation she responds to in the same paper on 8 May. Léo's prominence allowed her blatantly to associate herself with more than one group. However, that same prominence forced her to explain her actions to her large audience, including the leadership of the Union of Women. Feeling a bit pressured by Union officials, Léo responds in a letter that the advertised meeting and another held in Montmartre had "the exact same goal put forth by the Union of Women for the defense of Paris."<sup>113</sup> She demonstrates her alignment with this and other groups sharing her goals by her signature, concluding, "I signed previously, and I will sign always [with similar groups], André Léo."<sup>114</sup> Consciousness of the brevity of the Commune, as well as women's siege

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<sup>112</sup> *Le Cri du Peuple*, 2 Mai 1871.

<sup>113</sup> *Le Cri du Peuple*, 8 Mai 1871.

<sup>114</sup> Eichner discusses Dmitrieff's conflict with Léo in this regard in, *Surmounting the Barricades*, 81.

organization (indicated by Malenfant Rouchy's enrollment to sew jackets, for example), allow a better picture of the significance of women's rapid and effective organization, despite its lack of overall unity. Léo's perspective that women should unite behind their revolution, rather than divide themselves between Union and non-Union groups is reflected elsewhere.

Active since the siege-era, the Vigilance Committee of republican *citoyennes* of the XVIII arrondissement continued to meet during the Commune, in some ways defying the Union's calls for centralization of women's efforts. Neither only a club nor associated with the Union of Women, the Vigilance Committee's female representatives actively engaged in pressure politics. This Vigilance Committee had male and female components, although some – like Louise Michel – attended meetings of both. Beatrix Œuvrie Excoffons reported that as a representative of the Vigilance Committee, she had gone “to the clubs to get them to sign a petition by which the Commune would get Blanqui in exchange for the archbishop.”<sup>115</sup> Whether employing official Commune channels or not, some women therefore engaged in direct political petitioning, in this case for the release of a political prisoner. How many clubs Œuvrie Excoffons canvassed, how many signatures she collected, or on what date – if any – the petition was filed remain unclear. However, the Commune did hope to exchange the Archbishop for Blanqui. Nonetheless, Œuvrie Excoffons' statement suggests at least some women attended a range of club, committee, and Union meetings, finding them all useful. Œuvrie Excoffons' involvement in Commune-associated groups also suggests that,

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<sup>115</sup> Constant, *Mémoires de femmes*, 96.

despite Dmitrieff's call for centralization of women's efforts, the Union was not the only avenue of women's political pressure. Œuvrie Excoffons also participated in organizing ambulances and the Women's Vigilance Committee sent representatives to funerals and aided widows, mothers, and children, especially of those who "died for freedom."<sup>116</sup>

Women Vigilance Committee members continued to rout out men unwilling to fight, eventually arresting draft dodgers and the women aiding them. This was never an official component of Union organization though club discourse returned to these themes often. Vigilance Committees also represented the interests of women whose "profession" does not appear in Union employment registries.

When communards refused to use those who had been sex workers as *ambulancières*, Louise Michel encouraged these women to enter her Vigilance Committee in the XVIII arrondissement. Commune government support for women's *ambulancière* service was sporadic, with no organized enrolment despite Union enlistments and the reality of women's presence in ambulance positions. This remained a gendered point of contention throughout the Commune, with leadership more resistant than guardsmen on the whole. Regarding the use of former sex workers, Michel asked, "who has more right than these women, the most pitiful of the old order's victims, to give their lives for the new?"<sup>117</sup> Summarizing the importance of all aspects of communarde revolutionary activities (and revealing the lack of centralization overall), Michel concludes, "the women of 71" made up "the armies of the Commune, counting . . . *cantinières*, *ambulancières*, soldiers . . . the women of the committees of vigilance . . .

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Cited by Edith Thomas in "*Les Pétroleuses*," (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), 89.

those of *la Corderie* and in the schools . . . those who organized instruction while waiting for the battle in Paris where they were heroic . . . [and] *toutes* [who] can be counted with the . . . Commune and *elles* also, are legions.”<sup>118</sup> In ways that communard experience did not, working women’s experience reflected inherent overlap of life’s gendered arenas; *citoyennes*, therefore, made themselves available to the revolution on many fronts. Just as “*Citoyenne* Amanda” called for “a battalion . . . of *filles soumises*” at the V arrondissement’s St-Séverin on 10 May, Vigilance Committee *citoyennes* in the XVIII arrondissement recognized the contributions of those formerly marked by that title in ways communards negated.<sup>119</sup>

Women’s signatures appeared on Vigilance Committee petitions, later contributing to their convictions. Marie Lemonnier, *Veuve* Cartier was the mother of one and 37 years old at the time of the Commune.<sup>120</sup> She received a mere one year in prison for her contributions at barricades, but came to the attention of authorities due to her designation on a petition from the Vigilance Committee. As the authorities put it, “her name is found with the designation, ‘delegate to the republican vigilance committee of *citoyennes*’ on a petition addressed to members of the Commune to obtain [gain funding for] professional schools and lay orphanages.”<sup>121</sup> Louise Michel, “*présidente habituelle des clubs de femmes*,” responded personally to that accusation in Lemonnier Cartier’s behalf, stating that she, not Lemonnier Cartier, had developed the petition. Lemonnier

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<sup>118</sup> Michel, *La Commune*, 255.

<sup>119</sup> See Chapter III, fn. 151.

<sup>120</sup> AHG/Ly23/4<sup>e</sup> Conseil de guerre, Marie Vve Cartier, née Lemonnier.

<sup>121</sup> AN/BB24/758.

Cartier, according to Michel, had signed it without knowing what she was signing.<sup>122</sup>

Michel's attempt to shield others did not remove Lemonnier Cartier from suspicion or from her association with the Vigilance Committee. This case serves as an example of the many roles *citoyenne* vigilance committees played and demonstrates women's attempts to gain funding for their projects through direct petitioning to the Commune's elected government. The Union of Women simply did not serve as the only conduit of women's political activism.

The issues addressed by the Union of Women, Vigilance Committees, other "*committees des citoyennes*," and clubs did not fundamentally conflict, but were rarely identical. For example, I have found no evidence the Union of Women formally addressed sex workers, though nothing suggests they denied them work either. The published wording of a petition claims that over 400 *citoyennes* attending a Vigilance Committee meeting in the XVIII arrondissement on 6 May unanimously voted for a motion to end street prostitution.<sup>123</sup> At the same meeting – and certainly related – the assembly also voted for the immediate riddance of nuns from the *hospices* and prisons, allowing other women to fill those positions, something also called for in women's political clubs.<sup>124</sup> Simultaneously, the Union of Women issued its official manifesto, appearing in the same newspaper as this Vigilance Committee announcement. Given the

<sup>122</sup> AHG/Ly/4<sup>c</sup> Conseil de guerre, Marie Vve Cartier, née Lemonnier.

<sup>123</sup> *Le Cri du Peuple*, 10 May 1871. The 400 names do not appear in the newspaper version of the petition, though the announcement contains the names of the "Présidente: Poirier, Secrétaire: Jaclard, Assesseurs: Barois, Tesson." Demonstrating the challenges of assessing Commune involvement of so many "unknown" women, although likely the same, this Tesson may not be Joséphine Tesson, who served as a Union of Women committee member for the XIII arrondissement and who was later arrested. Presently, I don't have a first name for the Tesson who signed the Vigilance Committee petition from the XVIII arrondissement.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.* Hospices could include a variety of charitable social services, including asylums, workhouses, and homes for the destitute, aged, or parentless children.

gendered parameters of all women's lives, collective interests could not help but overlap, with some individuals evidently involved in many groups simultaneously. Not always united in their efforts under the rubric of the Union of Women, women pressured Commune government officers with political pressure practices that included petitions, declarations, ambulance organizing, newspaper letters and announcements, and arrests of those evading National Guard service. Sometimes, women's committees proved more effective than elected officials.

Representing various arrondissement committees of the Union of Women and other non-aligned groups, women appear to have addressed, even resolved, problems that the formalized Commune government did not. In one case, *La Sociale* reported on 28 April that *citoyennes* from the Union's Central Committee of the II arrondissement had met with those of the X and XI, aiding eight refugee families from Neuilly, composed of twenty-seven citizens.<sup>125</sup> Often, the expressed link between those offering charity and those receiving it was their experience of having "known cold, hunger, [even] having seen their child suffer in their arms," especially during the siege.<sup>126</sup> One thing the women's clubs, Vigilance Committees, the Union, and other *citoyenne* committees had in common was that they generally maintained "an exclusively female composition," with only women determining a volunteer's or a recipient's suitability.<sup>127</sup> Letters between female atelier overseers and Commune Central Committee members reveal that while a

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<sup>125</sup> *La Sociale*, 28 Avril 1871, "Communication des sociétés ouvrières." This is another example of the Union inconsistently using their formal name. In this case, the "sociétés ouvrières" are the Union's arrondissement committees.

<sup>126</sup> *La Sociale*, 13 Avril 1871.

<sup>127</sup> David A. Shafer's, "Plus que des ambulancières," 7, uses this phrase in discussing the women's Vigilance Committees, although I am broadening his point.



woman overseer might ask government leaders for funds or employment for women seeking aid, Central Committee members did not advise female leadership on such matters.<sup>128</sup> Male revolutionaries therefore did not determine a woman's fitness for aid or employment, taking women's advice as they attempted to fund employment and welfare projects, both fundamental components of the Commune's new order. As had been the case during the siege, women consistently argued for their rightful place as *ambulancières*, also a basic need for the Commune's military.

A posted announcement reveals women's persistent arguments that they should be able to work as *ambulancières*, despite continued hostility from male leadership. By the time the door of St-Pierre de Montmartre held women's proclamation at the beginning of May, almost seven months had passed since the siege began and Malenfant Rouchy publicly argued for women's place in ambulance ranks. Almost two months had transpired since Œuvrie Excoffons argued for her band of women to reorganize into ambulance support. Yet male leadership still resisted their presence in that role. At the church site in the XVIII arrondissement, women's Commune patriotism united with pressure on political and military institutions. The poster declares,

The citoyennes of Montmartre, meeting together, have decided to make ourselves available to the Commune to form ambulances, which would then follow the troops fighting the enemy. It is by these devoted acts and by the revolutionary spirit that will prove Montmartre women's patriotism for the Commune.<sup>129</sup>

The signatures of Jaclard, Léo, Poirier, and Buissard appeared at the bottom of this call, issued by the Presidency of the Vigilance Committee of the Republican *Citoyennes* of the

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<sup>128</sup> IISH/Descaves 32/letters of Lesnard, Bullot, James, and Serrière to Malon for some examples.

<sup>129</sup> Fontoulieu, *Les Églises de Paris sous la Commune*, 50. I have not located this announcement in archival or *Murailles* sources, but the church was seized in early April, the pattern of posting on the building doors was common, and the announcement he references fits descriptions of others.

XVIII Arrondissement. Léo, editor of *La Sociale* and previously a signatory on announcements from the Union of Women, a *citoyennes* committee in the XVII, and now the Vigilance Committee in the XVIII arrondissement, aligned herself with this cause on many occasions. Fontoulieu said the appeal “only achieved a mediocre success, with only two meetings and no real practical results,” although offering no specifics.<sup>130</sup> However, Léo, Vigilance Committees, club women, the Union of Women, as well as individuals such as Malenfant Rouchy had variously called for women’s *ambulancière* service, some since early in the siege.

Despite the participation of Malenfant Rouchy and many others, no formal conduit for women’s enrollment – or consistent government support for their efforts – had materialized. In the case of this *citoyennes*’ announcement, women “make themselves available” to the government; the government did not demand their availability in these venues, indicating women’s initiative in, not merely support for, defense of the Commune. Women’s persistent, though decentralized calls for their ambulance service highlight their attempts to demand formal acceptance in this field; in practice, they occupied the front-line positions, but had no formal avenue to organize their work. This proclamation also highlights the fact that women patriotically supported the Commune, though not necessarily its leadership’s decisions. Noticing the consistency with which women argued for their rightful place in the Commune ranks, rather than simply assessing the formalized acceptance of these arguments by Commune

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 50.

officials, makes points of contention clearer. Women continued to gather, speak, and hold office at sites men had dominated.

Working women continued to assert a political presence in clubs – even in locations from which they had been relatively absent. In doing so, they exercised free speech and voting rights. In early May, an *affiche* written in the name of the “*République Française une et indivisible*,” declared the opening of the “*Club Communal*” at the VI arrondissement’s Saint-Sulpice, meeting every night at 8pm.<sup>131</sup> Fontoulieu states that women only frequented the club in its final days, when they invaded it, “not only speaking, but holding office.”<sup>132</sup> Robert Tombs’ argument that women appeared more numerous at clubs towards the end of the Commune due to the fact men were busy elsewhere may or may not reflect a component of the situation. Whether or not men were around, however, at least some women evidently collectively affirmed their political influence, even rights, for the duration of the Commune. This collective presence brought them to the attention of observers. During the final week of May, *Versaillais* military personnel roamed the streets searching for communardes.

Women of all types formed a particular target, indicating their continuing influence on events, even while survival replaced politics on all fronts. On 26 May, British citizen, Mary Clarke Mohl, wrote of the barricades and the military’s fear of *pétroleuses*,

The state of the crowd is indescribable. At every crossroads there have been barricades, of which the remnants fill the streets, the pavement is frequently covered with dried or drying blood, the houses battered and half-ruinous [from bombardment]; at every corner

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<sup>131</sup> *Murailles*, II, 409.

<sup>132</sup> Fontoulieu, *Les Églises de Paris sous la Commune*, 254. He also mentions the presence of Louise Michel, whose attendance is well-known from many accounts, including her own.

a sentry orders [women] to walk in the middle of the street, that you may not be able to throw petroleum on the houses. I did not understand what the first sentry told me, and crossed over to the pavement; but he reiterated his orders and threatened to shoot me, which quickened my dull understanding. It would really be ignominious to have been shot as a suspected incendiary.<sup>133</sup>

Clarke Mohl describes the destruction of buildings, not from *pétroleuses*, but from artillery and gunfire. More importantly, her description exposes that her status as a female – not her words, clothing, armed actions, or membership in a particular economic class – heightened fear among the sentries of her neighborhood. Clarke Mohl’s account also reveals that the particular concern of the military was arson, not that she – or other women – might harm them otherwise, though surely overlap existed. Although supposedly only “guilty” women were to suffer street executions, Clarke Mohl’s experience strongly indicates that little evidence beyond sex category was needed for summary executions. Communardes and their supporters then and since argued that being a woman was enough to draw threatening armed attention from the military. Although poor, disheveled, wild “viragos” supposedly filled the ranks of *pétroleuses*, Clarke Mohl’s appearance did not reflect that profiling, suggesting her sex and mere presence near buildings on the street unnerved the soldier.

On 27 May, Clarke Mohl wrote,

Three o’clock: When I saw that the danger of pillage was over, I collected together the money, papers and plate I had hid, to have all under my hand in case of fire. But this danger too is rapidly passing away, as the whole population is watchful about it, to a degree, which it is difficult to imagine. I believe nobody, *certainly no woman*, could carry a bottle or any such vessel in a street where she is unknown without danger [to her]. The fury of a frightened population is quite ferocious, and really the shooting off-hand of people who carry no arms is a real public danger, and a very bad example. (Emphasis added)<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Margaret Lesser, ed., *Clarkey: A Portrait in Letters of Mary Clarke Mohl (1793-1883)* (Oxford, 1984), 193.

<sup>134</sup> Lesser, *Clarkey*, 193.

In these cases, people drew the attention of soldiers because they were female. Prominent during the Commune, women proved influential during its violent repression, garnering the attention of military personnel, even before military courts prioritized their trials along with members of the Commune's government and military leadership. The experience of another during Bloody Week also indicates sex-based identification influenced troops' decisions.

On one of the last, bloody days of the Commune, a boy of the streets, a *gamin*, evaded arrest and death at the hands of troops representing the Republic of France despite a death warrant having been issued in the *gamin*'s name. Although questioned and briefly searched, the boy's unremarkable appearance and hands seemingly unsoiled by petroleum or gunpowder allowed him passage through government troops' checkpoints, although those erecting barricades in desperate defense of the Commune solicited his services. He ignored their exhortations and traveled through the streets of Paris until finding refuge with friends. Upon reuniting with them, the boy, also known as thirty-two-year-old Victorine Malenfant Rouchy, removed from her clothing a red flag, a dagger, and self-incriminating account of Commune activities.<sup>135</sup> Women's revolutionary actions can become invisible for many reasons; in this case, the invisibility of this communarde's sex contributed to her safety in ways Clarke Mohl could not claim as troops looked for gendered markers of suspicion. Carrying a red flag and dagger – while criminal during Bloody Week – was also a political, even military, statement of sorts. During the final days of the Commune, women's political acts took many forms.

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<sup>135</sup> Brocher, *Souvenirs*, 202-215.

Reflecting on the last days of the Commune, Juliette Lamber Adam disclosed her political partnership with her husband, but also her political influence. She also divulged an inevitability factor, foreshadowing the Commune's end. Lamber Adam commented that, "Adam read my letters to our friends. They agree with my opinion: [some] more still than others."<sup>136</sup> Revealing intimate knowledge of her husband's political life, she reports of his attempt to "plead the case of the non-revolutionary [but republican] Parisians."<sup>137</sup> The conservative legitimists and orléanistes answered, "too bad for Paris if it is left to be subjugated by the bandits."<sup>138</sup> Lamber Adam then links this opinion with another of Adolphe Thiers', revealing the ultimate impossibility of her husband's approach. When meeting with Thiers, Monsieur Adam told him, "if we have the disease of the siege, M. President, you are the doctor whose first responsibility is to cure us and to administer what is necessary, to treat the causes and the symptoms of our illness." Thiers shouted, "Adam!" and turned his back on him. As Adam began to leave, Thiers turned, asking what the terms of compromise between Paris and Versailles might be. Adam's answer was, municipal elections, to which Thiers claimed that there was no time, as "the lists aren't even ready at the *mairies*."<sup>139</sup> When Adam suggested that Thiers give his pledge to maintain a Republic, and to have elections, Thiers showed the endgame. He told Adam that the only way to have a republic was to "brutally subdue the insurrection," proving to the "monarchists that the Republic can conquer a revolution."<sup>140</sup> Lamber

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<sup>136</sup> Lamber Adam, *Mes angoisses et nos luttes 1871-1873*, 109.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 81.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 83.

Adam not only had access to politically-influential people, exposing pre-Bloody Week planning for violence. As her shared letters indicate, she was politically influential.

Some men clearly viewed Monsieur Adam as “extreme” in his appreciation for what communardes were trying to do, indicating their gendered analysis of Lamber Adam’s political influence on him. One associate, evidently attempting to lower Adam to the political version of a browbeaten husband, told him that perhaps “it was [Juliette] who had pushed [M. Adam] to extremes.”<sup>141</sup> Not disavowing that possibility, perhaps even enjoying it, Lamber Adam commented in her book that, “perhaps before the [present] war [with Paris], during the siege, I had pushed him to the extremes, but [now, during the Commune] everyone detested the *fou de Bordeaux*,” indicating that her “extremes” of the past currently held a more mainstream status – at least in Paris.<sup>142</sup>

Still in Paris through Bloody Week, Geneviève Bréton’s “political education” at the ambulance formed the basis of her analysis.<sup>143</sup> Bréton sought political moderation, declaring that, “absolute power is not a strength.”<sup>144</sup> She argued, with examples, against hypocrisy and all absolutists. Her view of Thiers’ Versailles-based government was that it was absolutist in its efforts to snuff out all opposition, although she is without Lamber Adam’s personal knowledge of the political players. Despite her religiosity, Bréton despised the fact that, “Father Chenu . . . [formerly] braved bullets [during the siege] without flinching, but [recently] refused grace to a seven-year-old child because he feared being shot on suspicion of communism. He forgot [that] only two months earlier [upon

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid., 144. The “everyone” here appears to refer to the wide range of nominal republicans.

<sup>143</sup> Allen, *In the Solitude of My Soul*, 202.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

the Commune's establishment] he had shaken the dirty work hands of a convinced citizen in effusive fraternity.” Then there was the “chaplain who used to pass our hut without daring to enter [to assist or bless] and who lately let his beard grow to hide his insignia beneath an opened coat, [who] today came pretentiously into my room and invited me to a ‘TeDeum’ on Sunday. A ‘TeDeum,’ a hymn to so much blood! Oh no! I won’t go.”<sup>145</sup> She was presently neither communarde nor Versailles supporter, remaining adamantly opposed to ultimate power – or inconsistency.

On 4 June, Bréton left her station for the first time in months, her “task ended,” offering her conclusions before she entered the quiet of a convent to recover<sup>146</sup> “The Sisters are replacing us to nurse the few remaining wounded. Our moment began with the shelling and finished with the shooting, while the Sisters have the easiest and most pleasant job of tending the last scars. It’s time for me to go. I had a part in the pain. I want no part in the triumph.” She writes of the Versailles-embedded Republic and those who had abandoned Paris:

They, they are the real culprits, the people I haven’t seen for a year, who abandoned Paris during the war, who dared not risk death, and who insolently flaunted their utter indifference to everything but pleasure in our poor, foolish, and sublime town. They will not be shot, they will not be exiled, they will not be tried, but I condemn them as criminals, more criminal than the man who, dying of hunger, turned to the Commune because of these useless people.<sup>147</sup>

Bréton, along with other women, understood the economic and political bases of the Commune, having rendered service to its participants.

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 204, 205.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 204.



This chapter argued that assessing *des pouvoirs* of women's Commune participation discloses a wide range of political engagement showing influence and effectiveness beyond the limits of *le pouvoir* of republican suffrage. In a revolutionary political structure set against an ostensibly republican government and bourgeois interests, Commune officials could not rely solely on past protocol. Women's alignment with this "revolution from below" explicitly created them as revolutionary political actors, even if institutions above restricted municipal suffrage. Versailles-associated institutions, however, labeled presumed-communardes political detainees.

Women had instigated the Revolution of 18 March and this chapter demonstrated that notice of their input after that date redefines the Commune's political meaning beyond its elected male body. Even if they did not always change the policies of the Commune's leadership, women from a range of class interests provided guidance as the Commune developed. Whether atop a pool table, reorganizing a demonstration; submitting receipts for payment to the government; arguing for women's rightful employment as *ambulancières*; or writing letters to a politically-influential husband, later shared with other political men, women asserted themselves as political players. They created a political presence of which leaders were aware and to which they responded. Newspapers included meeting announcements, sections dedicated to women's interests and contributions, front-page editorials, and letters to the editors; all served as venues for political pressure. Some women's access to elected officials took forms such as personal or formal organizational letters, meetings with Commune leadership as representatives for educational changes, petitions, or, for someone like Lamber Adam, dinner parties.

Consistent descriptions of women wearing red insignias demonstrate collective support for the Commune, if not always for the policies of its elected leadership. Additionally, women voted in acts of direct democracy, even if they did not have republican suffrage.

This chapter exposed that despite a lack of consistent centralization, women's political pressure sought integration of women's experiences into Commune military, political, and social goals. Women's political actions often indicated their understanding of gendered, as well as class-based, oppression. They sometimes vehemently described ways to end it through access to military-associated jobs, equal pay, secular education for girls and women, divorce, recognition of domestic partnerships, and denial of an "illegitimate" status for children. Sex workers and those who understood their plight pressured for their rightful, if threatening inclusion. The discourse produced during the Commune defined it as the new order freeing those most traditionally marginalized, though its brevity made that impossible. Some tactics arose from the siege, but also reflect methods of political pressure already in existence for about 100 years. Commune government leaders recognized women's importance to the revolution's success, especially in acknowledging women's oversight of women's social service needs. The Commune's leadership never organized formal channels for women's *ambulancière* enrolment. Yet more often than not, in practice relinquished authority to women's desires for service in ambulance corps.

Reflected in this chapter is women's occupation of space holding particular political significance. The Union of Women committees functioned in all arrondissements and women lived in every part of Paris. Significantly, however, the bulk

of extant references highlighting political engagement appears to center especially in the I, IV, and XVIII arrondissements. (Figure 4.3) These locations reflect communarde association of traditional economic, political, and working-class power with those locations. The I arrondissement was literally and symbolically the center of Paris, perhaps contributing to its occupation by communardes. Commune electors occupied the Hôtel de Ville, encouraging political activities at that site and on surrounding streets. Montmartre served as the center of workers arrondissements, communicating its needs through communarde representatives. In terms of women's political influence therefore, this geographical distribution makes sense. Although not a consistently centralized effort – and perhaps productively so – women effected change and exposed their political priorities in this process.

Police, other observers, and ultimately, troops of the Republic, noted women's public political activism, often characterizing women as effective enough to be worthy of suspicion. Informally- and formally-organized women received attention long before Bloody Week, possibly influencing later assumptions about their organized responsibilities for fires. The police and military representing the conservative, even reactionary, Republic, saw themselves threatened by women. After arrest, women inundated police bureaucracy and the facilities set aside for their incarceration. National Guard records hint at the role they could play in locating women for arrest. The military troops representing the government of Moral Order watched for women, shooting some on sight, others, virtually as quickly. As André Léo had indicated, “women made the revolution;” many would take up arms in its defense.



**FIGURE 4.1, Hortense David.**  
Northwestern University Charles Deering McCormick  
Special Collections Library



**FIGURE 4.2, Christine d'Argent.**  
Northwestern University Charles Deering McCormick  
Special Collections Library



**FIGURE 4.3, Map of Concentrations of Women's Political Pressure.**  
**Map represents geographical concentration and prominence of communarde political pressure and expression in the I, IV, and XVIII arrondissements during the 1871 Paris Commune.**

## V. IN DEFENSE OF A “NEW LIFE”: WOMEN’S MILITARY PARTICIPATION (18 MARCH-28 MAY 1871)

Only two days after women’s early morning *rappel* initiating the Commune, Victorine Malenfant Rouchy received a call to military service. She described a meeting between herself, her husband, and a *garibaldien* soldier, whom both she and her husband remembered from previous military work.<sup>1</sup> Forming a battalion for “the defense of the Republic,” he wanted to enlist Malenfant Rouchy and her husband to do their part and oversee the officers’ mess.<sup>2</sup> Although initially hesitant, given their son had just died, they agreed, Malenfant Rouchy’s husband reminding her that it might be better for them if they did not “remain inactive given their sad memories.”<sup>3</sup> Within the next forty-eight hours, Mme Malenfant’s adopted charge also died.<sup>4</sup> The following day, wife and husband installed themselves at the National barracks, now renamed the barracks of the Republic. As she put it, “a new life began for us; there we had a room to ourselves, a magnificent kitchen, a large dining room, and a small kitchen for the people working there . . . a bust of *la République* (in plaster) [was in the largest room], coiffed with a Phrygian bonnet, surrounded by red draperies.”<sup>5</sup> Truly it appeared as though a new era had dawned. In addition to illuminating

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<sup>1</sup> Garibaldi had led Italian nationalist armies, in which quite a number of French had participated. He was revered by republicans and eventually came to France in the wake of the Commune. He was derided by many in the new, conservative National Assembly.

<sup>2</sup> Victorine Brocher, *Souvenirs d’une morte vivante* (Paris: François Maspero, 1977[1909]), 158. This statement also demonstrates that some viewed the establishment of the Commune as the establishment of the valid Republic. For a discussion of the perception of the Commune as the valid Republic, see, Philip M. Katz, *From Appomattox to Montmartre: Americans and the Paris Commune* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1998), 21.

<sup>3</sup> Brocher, *Souvenirs*, 158. Malenfant Rouchy, other than earlier referring to the child’s quick demise after the death of her son and noting the dates of the events, does not elaborate. The child died on 22 March, the day before she and her husband reported for duty at the barracks.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 149-51.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

Malenfant Rouchy's experiences during the first days of the Commune, this incident indicates that some men harnessed women's military services as part of their immediate response to events. Although food preparation certainly fell under the rubric of women's traditional fields of expertise, the new military of the Commune needed Malenfant Rouchy's individual knowledge and labor, not only her husband's.<sup>6</sup>

This chapter argues that women of the popular classes infiltrated Commune military organization and that their presence integrated gender into the most obvious component of revolution: armed combat. It shows that, along with verbal challenges and political pressure, women's Commune military participation altered the way the revolution – and its suppression – progressed. The military roles assumed by so many working women represented a challenge to gendered limits placed on their revolutionary involvement and partly explains their fate during Bloody Week. While women had occupied National Guard and other military units during the siege, women's armed presence during the Commune shocked contemporaries and subsequently led to severe punishment in its aftermath. Women's roles as participants and victims in combat and violence remain underanalyzed. Therefore, analyzing what was similar and divergent about women's siege and Commune military involvement reveals links between those moments, but also the greater threat of women's defiance of gender boundaries during the Commune. As such, this

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<sup>6</sup> In Malenfant Rouchy's case, it is likely this post depended on her efforts for the most part, as she notes from time to time that Rouchy's drinking and overall irresponsibility were problems more generally. That is, her reputation – not his – likely created the opportunity in the first place.



chapter examines communardes as perpetrators and objects of violence at the founding of the Third Republic.

The blatancy with which communardes occupied military posts, wearing formal and improvised military attire, indicates their allegiance to the Commune, but also their clear defiance of the limits placed on them by its leadership. The sheer range of women's service in front-line and supply-line military capacities makes public their conflict with male expectations. Since the Franco-Prussian war, military service could bring voting rights to underage males; this was not the case with women. As had Malenfant Rouchy in the autumn of 1870, however, some women again actively sought *postes de combat*, which allowed one to bear arms and which granted males a citizen's right to vote. During this war, which again included siege and bombardment against the inhabitants of Paris, women adroitly argued around limited male-based definitions of armed service. In doing so, they demonstrated the flaws of sex-based military service overall, but especially given civil war. Therefore, during the Commune, some women argued against – in practice, negated – sex-based citizenship. Sometimes, the “argument” took the form of presenting themselves for service and occupying military posts – and attire – no matter what men ordered. While access to the equal pay and rations of National Guard personnel could motivate service, revolutionary discourse about the Commune's new economic and social order explicitly implied that all must participate in its success. Thousands of women served in capacities that, if men held them, would routinely be considered citizen-soldier responsibilities. Women's citizen-soldier service highlights that the

Commune holds significance far beyond the conventional themes of working-class suffrage, popular uprisings, or traditional definitions of a “dictatorship of the proletariat.” Robert Tombs’ assessment of women’s involvement as “an activist minority of less than 100” has not taken into account the extent or implications of women’s military service.

The last part of this chapter examines the violence during 21-28 May, when military attire, barricade proximity, or weapons found in the possession of women drew them specifically to the attention of anti-Commune troops. By that last week, women served as shipboard gunlayers, artillery specialists, ammunition suppliers, and in other armed capacities. Some women carried arms openly on their person, while others hid them in boots or clothing. During *la semaine sanglante*, blackened hands or the presence of gunpowder on their bodies could sentence women to immediate death, “their guilt having been established.”<sup>7</sup> Anonymous working women of all ages gave their lives for many reasons, their bodies later buried in mass graves along with men’s. Some first had their clothing torn open, revealing their “true” sex category – and troops’ concern, not with ungendered enemies, but enemies who were female.<sup>8</sup> Rape was not uncommon. The police, as well as the military personnel and judicial system, equated women’s military activity with a world turned upside-down, which they sought to right. Accordingly, women were subject to arrests; shootings; and

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<sup>7</sup> William Pembroke Fetridge, *The Rise and Fall of the Paris Commune in 1871; with a Full Account of the Bombardment, Capture, and Burning of the City* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1871), 411.

<sup>8</sup> Fetridge, *The Rise and Fall of the Paris Commune*, 328.

sentences of prison terms, hard labor, deportation to colonial penal colonies, and life-long surveillance.

Chapter V challenges conclusions of Commune historian, Robert Tombs, who used sentencing records and the numbers they reflect in determining the range of women's involvement as "warriors and killers." He decided that these records "show a huge under-representation of women in the fighting, both in relation to the female population and in comparison with male participation."<sup>9</sup> From this, he argues that as there "was no accompanying demand from Communard women for equal citizenship in the far more central arena of political choice and decision," women provided only a "numerous and vocally commenting chorus," minimizing both components.<sup>10</sup> This assessment denies importance to women's military experience unless it proportionately correlates with census tallies or equals male participation. It also relies on a limited set of documents for support. Disregarding Eugene Schulkind's call for broader assessments of Commune-era sources, Tombs concludes that "few women were ever identified," and that the likely reason is that women were "marginal to the National Guard structure; their very presence may have been incidental, a consequence of their ubiquity in the streets."<sup>11</sup> The significance of this ubiquity has been glossed over in most assessments of the Commune.

Using only sentencing records produces a limited view of women's overall participation; this is perhaps especially true for women's military involvement. That

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<sup>9</sup> Tombs, "Warriors and Killers: Women and Violence During the Paris Commune, 1871," *The Sphinx in the Tuilleries and other essays in Modern French History; Papers presented at the Eleventh George Rude Seminar*, eds. Robert Aldrich and Martyn Lyons (Sydney: University of Sydney, 1999), 172.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 172, 177.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 179.

methodology does not take into account memoirs, newspapers, arrest records, records of those who escaped France, or notations about those who died in the fighting – as scattered and incomplete as they may be. How did police determine whom to arrest prior to the production of sentencing records? What about André Léo, the Malenfant women, Paule Minck, or *La Matelassière* – none having appeared before a tribunal? That is, a narrow focus on apprehensions leading to convictions then sentencing, neglects other records in which women's actions become visible, even if at times anonymously performed. Additionally, Tombs's attention to the "central arenas of political choice," or "*le pouvoir*," limits analysis of Michelle Perrot's "*des pouvoirs*," most of them central to women's experience, if not to later political or military historians. Women certainly occupied a "numerous and vocally commenting chorus" – as an earlier chapter divulged in greater detail. However, Tombs' disregard for the significance of that chorus and women's other roles, minimizes and marginalizes women's armed defense.

Women within the battalions of the National Guard were not numerically dominant and also faced explicit gendered opposition to their presence. However, an equal ratio between women and men in armed service is not a prerequisite for historical analysis. In particular, women did not wait for the formal channels most often analyzed, leaving them less visible in the historiography, if not in Commune streets. While I agree with Tombs that women were ubiquitous in those streets, his description offers no breakdown as to what they were doing, devaluing their presence; this chapter offers a more detailed analysis of their activities. Malenfant

Rouchy's account reminds the reader of the complexities of communarde military service. She also serves as an example of why sentencing records leave lacunae when assessing women's military participation, as her name never appears in them.<sup>12</sup>

Malenfant Rouchy overlapped her role as citizen-soldier with forms of humanitarian aid, demonstrating her perspectives about the Commune's "military" obligations. Her skills in many areas highly recommended Malenfant Rouchy for the military post overseeing the officers' mess, a job she soon combined with another desperately-needed endeavor. Shortly after starting her work at the barracks, she approached the commander, asking if she might – for two hours each morning – prepare and serve food to the impoverished hungry. She parenthetically adds, "they were not lacking in Paris during these times."<sup>13</sup> Granted permission, she and her staff "accepted men, women, and children, in groups of six; when each group finished, six other individuals entered. I didn't ask where they came from or who they were; they were hungry, that was all that mattered to me."<sup>14</sup> In this effort, she made use of military supplies, equipment, personnel, and space, gaining official permission to do so. Feeding the poor was as much a part of Malenfant Rouchy's revolutionary agenda as feeding male military officers. She was more organized than the military as a whole.

In her memoir, Malenfant Rouchy exposes the military challenges that lay

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<sup>12</sup> However, a death warrant was issued in her name and her husband was arrested, tried, and convicted. Malenfant Rouchy, while remaining invisible to police for almost two years in Paris, managed to gather character reference letters in behalf of her husband, reducing his sentence substantially, and visited him on a number of occasions. He did not survive prison. Jean Rouchy communicated with his wife by pretending she was a sister, using a false name for her.

<sup>13</sup> Brocher, *Souvenirs*, 159.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

ahead, as well as the diverse crew making up the Commune military. She recounts that,

My battalion was not yet organized, clothed, equipped, nor armed; among us there were *zouaves*, *spahis*, *turcos*; I had in my [kitchen] service, a *nègre*, a very good young man. . . and despite what some evil-minded have reported, I never saw a man drunk. . . . everyone conducted themselves with dignity and respect.<sup>15</sup>

The military arm of the Commune had a tough road ahead, however much devotion they inspired. With her statement, Malenfant Rouchy also indicates the variety of people on whom the Commune depended. As Malvina Souville Blanchecotte had indicated when watching the funeral procession, the make-up and organization of the military had changed. Women's participation was part of that change, although many, like Malenfant Rouchy, had served with the military during the siege. With the Commune on the military defensive throughout its existence, in many ways, all things became military interests.

Military discussions among Commune officials invariably turned on the necessity of keeping Paris orderly and reasonably united. The early official meetings of the Commune governing body, sitting at the Hôtel de Ville, began by discussing the immediate need to establish and outfit ambulance companies and the dire situations of orphans, widows, and the elderly requiring public assistance.<sup>16</sup> These issues remained significant throughout the weeks of the Commune. This point highlights the relevance of women's arguments for ambulance service and their traditional oversight in tending to vulnerable populations. However, the Council

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid. This last statement is her refutation of the many reactionary accounts that reported generalized inebriation among troops – and Parisians more generally.

<sup>16</sup> *Les Séances Officielles*, 8-9.

subsequently decided that at each meeting, it would always address pressing military matters first, gendering “military matters” male with this action. Consequently, barricade construction, bombardment of Paris, and deaths of troops came to occupy primary agenda points. However, during Council discussions, Commune officials invariably merged these topics with Parisian order and unity. As such, ambulance service, pensions for survivors of National Guard members, care for the elderly, shelters for the impoverished, food, medical supplies, and the production of clothing for military and non-military personnel permeated “military” discussions at every turn.<sup>17</sup> In each case, these Commune “military” priorities promoted women’s visibility and the necessity of their contributions. Examining the stated first priority of the Commune government – increasing the size of the ambulance corps – reveals that male doctors and female *ambulancières* often had conflicting priorities. Alix Milliet Payen’s letters reveal some of the challenges women faced as they carried out battlefield medical service.

Milliet Payen, twenty-nine during the Commune, served as an *ambulancière* in her husband Henri’s National Guard unit during the Commune. A republican *bourgeois*, Payen’s father was among those exiled in 1851; a brother had served in Garibaldian forces, and for France in Algeria and Mexico. Milliet Payen and her husband – a *commerçant parisien* – served during the siege and Commune, as did

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<sup>17</sup> Summary of these components of April 1871 meetings of the Paris Commune Central Committee in *Les Séances Officielles*, 7-139.

Henri's brother and sister-in-law.<sup>18</sup> Writing letters, primarily to her mother, saved Milliet Payen from "remain[ing] anonymous" within the revolution's history.<sup>19</sup> Despite leadership's stated need for more ambulance workers and women's adamant demands to serve, women like Milliet Payen consistently faced gendered challenges.

Milliet Payen's attempt to follow her husband to the front only appears traditional if one assumes she was welcome there as a "camp follower," a woman providing domestic services to the troops. However, the term had become an overt euphemism for sex worker, as siege-era pronouncements articulating them as suspects revealed. Nonetheless, camp followers from various contingents of women – nuns, wives, or single females – had long provided the entire array of domestic services necessary to keep soldiers in the field. After 1840, the camp follower roles of wives had been officially eliminated in France, replaced by nuns doing the nursing and unmarried women wearing uniforms performing non-nursing duties, as with *cantinières*.<sup>20</sup> Since the siege in 1870-1871, and especially during the Commune, women had attempted to restructure that thirty-year tradition of exclusion. Learning Henri had already left for the front and surmounting "1,000 objections" from male

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<sup>18</sup> Louis Constant, *Mémoires de femmes, mémoire du peuple* (Paris: François Maspero, 1979), 60. See also, Paul Milliet, ed., *Une famille de républicains fouriéristes: les Milliet*, Vols. I-XI (Paris, 1911). Volumes IX and X include the 1870-71 era, with Section III in Volume X devoted specifically to "Alix Payen, Ambulancière," 65-100. Some of this section is reprinted in Constant's, *Mémoires de femmes*. Fourieristes followed the utopian views of Charles Fourier (1772-1837), which included accommodating forms of equality for women. Although sometimes credited with coining the term, *féminisme* in 1837, this is erroneous, although exposes the association between fouriéristes and arguments for the rights of women. For Fourier's association with the term, *féminisme*, see, Karen Offen, "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach," *Signs* 14, No. 1 (1988), 126.

<sup>19</sup> Constant, *Mémoires de femmes*, 60.

<sup>20</sup> Linda Grant DePauw, *Battle Cries and Lullabies: Women in War from Prehistory to the Present* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), 144.



leadership, Milliet Payen finally received authorization for her departure.<sup>21</sup> She did not state the particulars of the objections nor how she eventually received permission. She prepared her “*petite pharmacie*,” and left for Fort Issy.<sup>22</sup> Gunfire was constant, with no sleep due to work and the noise. Milliet Payen described to her mother the challenges associated with the unit’s surgeon not wanting to enter the front line trenches, “where he would have been most useful.”<sup>23</sup> Instead, Milliet Payen entered those trenches, taking her little medical bag, hoping to find no wounded, but always disappointed. Milliet Payen’s letters imply not only official and medical resistance to her presence, but that the doctors’ resistance forced her to function as a default doctor.

The gendered limits placed on Milliet Payen contributed, perhaps ironically, to the expansion of her *ambulancière* responsibilities. Male military ineptitude and personal loss increased her challenges. She regularly dressed and tended wounds on the battlefield, although technically not her responsibility. According to her, she was supposed to care for the wounded only after they had been brought to areas behind the front lines. Some day prior to 11 April, Henri Payen’s *tabaterie*, a breech-loading rifle introduced in 1867, exploded, spraying powder in his eye, wounding him.<sup>24</sup> She later commented that within a short time she has seen a dozen men blinded by such

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<sup>21</sup> Constant, *Mémoires de femmes*, 60.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 63. A number of doctor-officers, who generally were pressed into service by the Commune, objected to having to serve, perhaps as much or more than having women in their ambulances.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

accidents.<sup>25</sup> However, neither this nor military insufficiencies deterred Milliet Payen from her *ambulancière* duties. Adding to Malenfant Rouchy's observations, Milliet Payen wrote that, "services are badly organized; those in the trenches have neither equipment nor camp supplies," forcing them to scavenge for radishes or anything else growing close by.<sup>26</sup> Supplies tended to arrive two days late.<sup>27</sup> Her experiences at Vanves and other locations were similar to Issy, with disorganization and unwilling surgeons the norm.<sup>28</sup> Milliet Payen's account suggests that her exposure to normative sexism continued throughout her battlefield experience.

Sex discrimination and *de facto* battlefield work were the realities for Milliet Payen throughout the Commune. As such, she continued to face situations requiring expanded medical and organizational knowledge. Writing on 14 May to her mother, Milliet Payen complained that, "the doctor poorly received the [*ambulancières*], but it was necessary he do his part."<sup>29</sup> "The doctor declared that in his absence, [Milliet Payen] was in charge of the ambulance."<sup>30</sup> True to this line of authority, "the doctor was absent when a bullet hit one man in the leg and [she] dressed it."<sup>31</sup> Some doctors appear to have resisted Commune participation or slacked off due to ideological or class-based reasons. Malenfant Rouchy and Milliet Payen attest, however, that

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 75. Henri Payen (and others who suffered similar accidents) died from his injuries, as he could neither eat nor drink as a result of their severity. Milliet, *Une famille de républicains fouriéristes: les Milliet*, Vol. X, 96.

<sup>26</sup> Constant, *Mémoires de femmes*, 65.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>28</sup> Milliet Payen's account reveals circumstances later duplicated during World War I, although here presented with a woman's view of the frontlines. These include poor organization, bad leadership, faulty weaponry, inconsistent supply lines, and trench warfare.

<sup>29</sup> Constant, *Mémoires de femmes*, 82.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. Given the realities of such wounds, Milliet Payen's understatement of what it meant to "dress" a wound, along with similar understatements by Malenfant Rouchy and others, is noticeable.

gendered resistance to female ambulance personnel, and not merely class-based dismissiveness was prominent during the siege and Commune. However, male lack of acceptance of women's presence enabled the expansion of some women's battlefield roles. Women's "authority" to do ambulance work took many forms.

Sophie Doctrinal, *dite* Poirier organized over eighty women for *ambulancière* service, claiming military channels – not Union of Women or "political" ones – for her work.<sup>32</sup> Her use of "military" is somewhat rhetorical in that all Commune government representatives participated in military oversight. Here, however, Poirier linked *ambulancière* work with specified military priorities, as had those attending the first meeting of the Commune government. During post-Commune interrogation, Poirier admitted to her service in the ambulances. She claimed to have organized women's participation in the field units accompanying the troops.<sup>33</sup> In response to police questions about her contact with both Central Committees, she answered that she "didn't have any meetings or correspondence with the members of the [Union of Women's] Central Committee or with the delegates of the Commune."<sup>34</sup> Poirier clarified that she "only had contact with the military authority – delegate Moreau – for the laissez-passers that [she] requested for the *ambulancières*."<sup>35</sup> Since the Union of Women had recruited and coordinated some *ambulancières*, police appear to have often assumed this line of authority, although the Union was only one conduit of

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<sup>32</sup> AHG/Ly23/101, Lemarchand (Doctrinal, Poirier), Procès Verbal 11 July 1871.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Édouard August Moreau (1836-1871) had most recently been in London, overseeing his artificial flower business, returning to Paris when war was declared in July 1870. He had served in the National Guard with distinction. He was among those who called for elections following 18 March events, in order to "legalize" the situation. He served as a Commune official assisting in oversight of the war.

several. Poirier's account offers another example of the inconsistency with which various communards encouraged or rejected women's ambulance service. Even when encouraged to serve, female ambulance corps members faced normative sexism that many found inhibiting to their service and inappropriate, given the Commune's goals.

A front-page 6 May article by André Léo divulged that Commune discourse of equal pay for women in National Guard service had not resulted in equal treatment and status. Léo articulated the collective challenges faced by women in military service – especially those of *ambulancières*. She wrote of the “*Aventures de Neuf Ambulancières à la Recherche d'un Poste de Dévouement*.”<sup>36</sup> Theoretically, as of 13 April the Commune would pay *ambulancières* the same pay and offer the same supplies as those allotted to sous-officers.<sup>37</sup> Léo countered this point with her description of the misogyny experienced by *ambulancières* in the field. In particular, she directed her critique toward doctors and other officers who regularly offered up a variety of “brutal insults.”<sup>38</sup> In addition to descriptions similar to Milliet Payen's, Léo made public the normative sexism of “esteemed men.” Gendered harassment included verbal insults, assaults on character and professionalism, and sending women on unneeded errands or to nonexistent personnel.<sup>39</sup> This could appear as common gendered, if boorish, behavior on the part of these men. However, the

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<sup>36</sup> *La Sociale*, 6 Mai 1871.

<sup>37</sup> *Journal Officiel*, 13 Avril 1871. This decree also addresses overall organization of field ambulances.

<sup>38</sup> *La Sociale*, 6 Mai 1871.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

newspaper response by Commune War Delegate, Louis Rossel reveals the possibilities for change, which the Commune represented for women.<sup>40</sup>

Demonstrating that Commune leaders were among Léo's readership, Rossel responded the next day. He stated that he would like to know, perhaps through direct correspondence with Léo, how he "could use these devoted [*citoyennes*], [whose services] remain untapped."<sup>41</sup> Rossel addressed his query to "*Citoyen* André Léo, editor of *La Sociale*," immediately greeting her as "Madame." Rossel exposes his awareness of her sex category, but also employs an ungendered use of *citoyen*, divulging a sophisticated feminist structural analysis.<sup>42</sup> He wrote that he "read with regret" the article in which Léo noted the little respect granted "*citoyennes* on the battlefield."<sup>43</sup> Rossel's response indicates not only his view that women were, and should be, on the battlefield. His use of *citoyennes* at this junction illuminates his intention of making perfectly clear the gendered, male-sponsored disrespect. I propose that for him, the current situation exposed, not a misuse of socio-economic class status (officers against "lowers," perhaps), but a misuse of sex class status – something against Commune standards. Despite his formal authority, Rossel also appears to have had little, if any, understanding of how he might alleviate the obstacles, asking for Léo's direct aid. Even if his is a less-sophisticated show of

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<sup>40</sup> Louis Nathaniel Rossel (1844-1871) was, at the time, serving as the Commune's *délégué à la Guerre*, having replaced Gustave Cluseret on 30 April.

<sup>41</sup> *La Sociale*, 7 Mai 1871.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid. I do not know how Rossel would describe this point, but given conventional salutations and gender markers in French language, his use must have been intentional – and perhaps noticed by few. French materialist feminist analysis is especially useful for understanding the ways language exposes sex oppression.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

some sort of deference, it still suggests he deemed deference necessary. This article and Rossel's response indicate Léo spoke for many more, less visible women, women that members of military officialdom could not afford to alienate or frustrate. Suggested solutions were forthcoming.

Viewed through a wider lens, Léo's representation of women as a class and the relationship between women's demands and Commune military problems become clearer. For Rossel, having only taken the reins of military leadership on 30 April, Léo's allegations may have been just the most recent indication of military inefficiencies. Immediately beneath Rossel's letter of 7 May, an announcement appears, describing Rossel's visit to the Commune government on 4 May at 5PM. At this visit, he directly denounced orders given by the Committee of Public Safety, to which the *ambulancières* had become subject in their travails later described by Léo. He argued adamantly that the Committee should change their commands, assailing overall disorder, lack of discipline, and incompetence of some of the leaders. Rossel did not reflect the same top-down views of those who held elected power and blocked women's consistent access to military-associated positions. The next issue of *La Sociale* on 8 May includes Léo's article, "*La Révolution sans la femme*," reminding General Dombrowski about "who made the Revolution of 18 March."<sup>44</sup> Her berating of Dombrowski takes on a stronger, more threatening tone when integrated within the tension in the formal Commune military and political ranks.<sup>45</sup> If the Commune's

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<sup>44</sup> *La Sociale*, 8 Mai 1871.

<sup>45</sup> For more on the turmoil that found War Minister, Cluseret, arrested and Rossel elevated to that position, see, Philip M. Katz, *From Appomattox to Montmartre*. Katz uses Cluseret, who also served

military was inept or in turmoil, she implies, Dombrowski especially can not afford to alienate women volunteers.

Examining *citoyennes*' demand for battlefield service without sexist harassment exposes its relationship to military problems more generally. On 9 May, Léo obliges Rossel's prior request, suggesting a series of needed changes designed to ease women's ability to enrol, organize, and train *ambulancières*.<sup>46</sup> She expressly depicts all three components as under women's oversight. Having slipped his scolding letter to Commune representatives to the press, the embattled Rossel found himself accused of treason against the Commune, going into hiding until found by Versailles troops following Bloody Week.<sup>47</sup> Women would still have to fight for every position they entered. Léo is not representative of the level of influence and formal contacts most women could manipulate. However, the evidence she forcefully employs in her articles reveals the personal experiences of less rhetorically-powerful – and most-often, anonymous – women. Milliet Payen's and Malenfant Rouchy's similar stories add credence to that representation. For Rossel, critique of the formal leadership, who excluded women from equal citizen service, was the end of his service to the Commune. Léo was not alone in representing working women's gendered challenges during the Commune.

Likely the most renowned of communardes, Louise Michel's observations of male responses to women's military participation mirrored those of Léo. Michel

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in the American Civil War, to demonstrate the ideological and material links between the United States and the Commune.

<sup>46</sup> *La Sociale*, 9 Mai 1871.

<sup>47</sup> He was eventually shot after a summary trial, on 28 November 1871.

argued that rather than seeking men's approval, women should step up and seize equality themselves. She later recalled about her experience in the Commune,

The most advanced men applauded the idea of equality [between the sexes]. I noticed – I had seen it before, and saw it later – that men, their declarations notwithstanding, although they appeared to help us, were always content with just the appearance. This was the result of custom and the force of old prejudices, and it convinced me that we women must simply take our places without begging for it.<sup>48</sup>

The “Red Virgin,” neither married to nor dependant on a man, noticed women's oppression, as had the married Alix Milliet Payen. As Léo had also argued, due to military necessity and Commune ideals now replacing “old prejudices,” women's service could not be easily minimized – rhetorically or in practice. Speaking for “we women,” Michel identified a gendered disparity in Commune equality, but also a solution: women taking their places in the new order, bypassing male approval. By early April, Malenfant Rouchy had left the mess hall, returning to *ambulancière* duties in her attempt to contribute to that new order.

Malenfant Rouchy's work indicates the effectiveness of women's military participation, perhaps due to its less-formal association with the official National Guard hierarchy. She reserved the bulk of her Commune descriptions for her activities as an *ambulancière*, generally under fire on the battlefield.<sup>49</sup> As of 3 April, “the siege began again,” with the shells raining down on sections of Paris and its outskirts.<sup>50</sup> According to Malenfant Rouchy, in her unit, “everyone wanted to march into combat,” but weapons were in short supply, and some, when found, were

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<sup>48</sup> Bullitt Lowry and Elizabeth Ellington Gunter; eds. and trans., *The Red Virgin: Memoirs of Louise Michel*, 59.

<sup>49</sup> Brocher, *Souvenirs*, 155-206.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.



rusted.<sup>51</sup> As she repeated here, “military organization was absolutely defective.”<sup>52</sup> By this time, Malenfant Rouchy had months of previous experience serving with a National Guard unit and had, yet again, “prepared everything necessary for our wounded, [given] the identical circumstances [as during the first siege].”<sup>53</sup> She used cognac to aid the wounded in their pain and her compatriots risked their lives for her when she came under heavy fire.<sup>54</sup> She served with generally unnamed *cantinières*, “valiant *citoyennes*” with “great courage,” some wounded or dying in the fighting.<sup>55</sup> They often lacked supplies and more than once had to “drink from empty ammunition boxes,” although clean water was also at a premium at times.<sup>56</sup> Her unit lost seventy-two soldiers in one attack on 1 May, times like this leaving her with the duties of caring for the dead, rather than the living.<sup>57</sup> Her experience, analysis, strength, and labor – and the deprivations she suffered – reflect those of other women.

Even before Bloody Week, communardes suffered deprivations on the battlefield beyond city walls, sometimes becoming targets of physical abuse, then death, at the hands of Versailles troops. Later, the same troops would enter Paris. On 16 May, the Commune’s governing body addressed a recent battlefield atrocity against a communarde. Citizen Raoul Urbain offered the report of Lieutenant Butin of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Company of the 105<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the National Guard, who had witnessed

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 182.

an assault through his field glasses.<sup>58</sup> According to the Lieutenant, he saw a wounded soldier, abandoned on the battlefield. He immediately “sent a woman attached to the ambulance, who was wearing a [red cross] armband” and carrying papers identifying her as an *ambulancière*; she had “courageously aided the wounded in all her previous actions.”<sup>59</sup> According to Butin, “she had scarcely arrived at the Guard’s location, when she was seized by five *Versillais*, who . . . raped her and . . . shot her on the spot.”<sup>60</sup> He noted that the *outrage* occurred because he could not (or would not) send men into the field to help her. Urbain wanted an immediate retribution, using hostages, which the Commune held.

The plan for retribution for the communarde’s death gained notoriety. Urbain suggested that, “ten hostages be shot within 24 hours as a reprisal for the murder of the *cantinière assassinée*.”<sup>61</sup> Five were to be shot within the city walls, in the presence of the National Guard, with five others to be shot at the aforementioned post by the Guards who witnessed the crime, “as near as possible to the place where the crime was committed.”<sup>62</sup> Not mentioning (nor perhaps knowing about) the rape, Mme Talbot in a letter to Mme Delaroche-Vernet summarized the event by saying that, “some asked the Commune yesterday, to shoot five hostages for one *cantinière*

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<sup>58</sup> Georges Bourgin and Gabriel Henriot, eds., *Procès-verbaux de la Commune de 1871*, Tome II (Mai 1871) (Paris: Imprimerie A. Lahure, 1945), 380-1. This event was also reported in *La Sociale* and *Le Cri du Peuple*, 21 May 1871. Urbain (1837-1902), a teacher, served in various capacities while a member of the Commune. Arrested, he was sentenced to forced labor *à perpétuité*, but returned to France with the amnesty in 1880.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 381.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 381-3.

or *ambulancière*, who was shot, they said, by the Versailles.”<sup>63</sup> However, attention soon shifted to male prisoners.

*Versillais* mistreatment of male prisoners and Commune protocol trumped immediate action in response to the rape and murder of the unnamed member of the 105<sup>th</sup> Battalion. During the Council’s meeting, a long discussion ensued as another Commune member, J. B. Clement, brought up the ongoing mistreatment of (male) prisoners at Versailles, which he wanted addressed.<sup>64</sup> Additionally, Commune members debated the fact that their government was subject to its own laws. This fact limited the conditions under which people could be arrested and then taken as hostages. Some reminded other members of the roles of juries in these decisions.<sup>65</sup> These issues, as well as the Commune leadership’s distaste for shooting hostages, resulted in no action taken.<sup>66</sup> Throughout the descriptions of this unfortunate communarde, her name is never given and she is variously referred to as an *ambualncière*, a *cantinière assassinée*, and finally, an *infirmière*; other women’s experiences propose that she could have been all three simultaneously. Men appear to have understood that.

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<sup>63</sup> André Delaroche-Vernet, *Une famille pendant la guerre et la Commune, 1870-71: Lettres* (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1912), 254.

<sup>64</sup> Jean-Baptiste Clément (1836-1903) had taken part in both siege-era declarations of the Commune. A member of the Vigilance Committee of the XVIII arrondissement and the *Club de la boule noire*, he was elected to the Commune, eventually escaping Paris following Bloody Week.

<sup>65</sup> Bourgin and Henriot, *Procès-Verbaux de la Commune de 1871*, Tome II, 388.

<sup>66</sup> *La Sociale* took note on 4 May that the *Times* of London (“the newspaper of the English bourgeoisie”) had accused Versailles troops of cruelty, while not noting this case in particular. The paper argued that these actions would only increase the ranks of defenders of the Commune. Although the Commune executed some hostages during Bloody Week (and this fueled anti-Commune fires), overall, the goal was to exchange prisoners and to leverage their power against Versailles. However, Versailles had no interest in their offers and was quite willing to mistreat prisoners anyway, even on the battlefield. The Commune’s distaste for hostage-taking, as well as their unwillingness to violate their own laws and scruples, resulted in hostage-taking being a fairly impotent act overall.

By employing various titles to describe her military association, the males discussing the woman's rape and murder disclose the overlap of women's battlefield contributions. They evidently found no conflict between the terms. Given simultaneous resistance to women's organized presence in those roles, evidently *de facto* military needs often trumped protocol. This had also been the case when Malenfant Rouchy joined ambulance service during the siege. However, the discussion following the rape and murder indicate a shift in focus from the woman's body, to those of male prisoners; the reported impotence by National Guardsmen watching the rape and murder of one of their own was never discussed again. Given communard resistance to women's presence as *ambulancières*, it is surprising that no Commune members used this incident to argue that women should not be on the battlefield. Nonetheless, it does not appear they did. Although her name is invisible, the record makes public her existence on the front lines of military conflict and that Commune military and political leadership initially found her loss worthy of retribution. Some women fared better against male attackers.

Other accounts second the evidence that "*cantinières*" did not only bring food and drink to male troops. The same day as the formation of the Union of Women on 11 April, a brief account appeared in *La Sociale*, commending the brave soldiering of a *cantinière*. Her name, however is not revealed.<sup>67</sup> She had regularly shot her gun alongside other members of her company at Neuilly. In that capacity, she had been followed by a gendarme when the group separated in street fighting. The gendarme,

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<sup>67</sup> *La Sociale*, 11 Avril 1871. The article also appeared in *l'Affranchi* on 13 Avril 1871.

who “absolutely wanted to carry her off,” received an unexpected surprise, as the *cantinière* suddenly appeared around a corner, killing him. The article describes the ovation she received from her compatriots in arms, as well as civilians. On a separate occasion, *cantinière*, Marcelliane Expilly, “killed a gendarme,” contributing to her condemnation in the Commune’s aftermath.<sup>68</sup> Women saved their own lives and those of others as they demonstrated proficiency serving in *postes du combat*.

Categories of *cantinière*, *ambulancière*, and *poste du combat* repeatedly overlapped. In traditional military history, the term, *cantinière*, has generally brought to mind women’s food provisioning, but those serving under that rubric during the Commune likely found *poste du combat* the more appropriate identification. One *cantinière* received resounding accolades from her male comrades in arms. In a letter to the Commune government, published on 10 April in *La Sociale*, seventy-three male National Guards signed a letter, recognizing Marguerite Gainer, *épouse* Lachaise of the 66<sup>th</sup> Battalion, for her service.<sup>69</sup> The adjective, *épouse*, rather than *dite*, is somewhat unique, given she was not married to Lachaise. This point indicates a chosen partnership that appeared to observers as functioning as a marriage in practice, if not in law. Her trial records refer to her as “*maîtresse de Lachaise*,” indicating authorities’ understanding of the relationship, if not her battalion’s. (Figure 5.1)<sup>70</sup> Noting her home address on rue Sedaine in the XI arrondissement, the undersigned commended her “*plus grande virilité* in remaining all day on the

<sup>68</sup> AN/BB24/761, Expilly (Marcelliane).

<sup>69</sup> *La Sociale*, 10 Avril 1871.

<sup>70</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/ Femme Prévost, née Gumder (sic), Marguerite, maîtresse de Lachaise; available from <http://www.library.northwestern.edu/spec/siege/images/PAR01040.JPG> ; Internet; accessed on 17 July 2005.

battlefield.” The seventy-three described Gaudier Lachaise’s service in caring for all wounded, “despite the absence of all surgical services.” The men wanted to call the Commune’s attention to her actions so that Commune leadership might grant her the rewards she deserved, given the “courage and unselfishness of this most accomplished *citoyenne* and republican.” These men understood the necessity of this communarde’s labor on the battlefield, going out of their way to make its significance public. In another case, Louise Michel’s memoirs describe Marie Schmitt Gaspard as a “stretcher bearer and soldier,” aligning with trial and pardon records indicating Schmitt Gaspard’s simultaneous association with an ambulance and with weapons.<sup>71</sup> Traditional gendered categories of military-associated service did not keep women from frontline action. In many instances, women’s military participation did not wait for either formal calls from the Commune’s elected leadership or the establishment of the *Union des femmes*.

Although 11 April marked the official declaration of the *Union des femmes pour la Défense de Paris et les soins aux blessés*, women had not waited that long to answer calls for naval service. By early April, calls went out for *marins* to serve on *canonnières* along the Seine.<sup>72</sup> They were to report to the Pont Neuf, and by 9 April, six gunboats were in service to the Commune; by 12 April, *La Sociale* noted eight.<sup>73</sup> By 23 April, artist, AC, counted 20-30 women serving on gunboats, some consenting

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<sup>71</sup> Michel, *Memoirs*, 101, 195. AN/BB24/747, Demande en Grâce, Gaspard (femme), née Schmitt.

<sup>72</sup> For the initial call, see *La Sociale*, 6 April 1871.

<sup>73</sup> For the readiness of the *cannonnières*, see *La Sociale*, 9 April and 12 April 1871.

to pose for him.<sup>74</sup> The observer noted that these gunlayers, these “dames,” as he called them, served aboard over a dozen *canonnières*, including, “Le Claymore, Le Sabre, La Mitrailleuse, La Bayonnette, La Canonade, Le Dauphin, La Liberté, L’Espcopette, La Puebla, La Rapide, La Vedette, La Poudrière, La Nuit et Jour, Le Perrier, etc.”<sup>75</sup> He wrote that these gunlayers told him that “more of them [women] are at La Porte Maillot, Montmartre, and other fortified places etc.”<sup>76</sup> His comments on another drawing include the fact that, “Cluseret, Minister of War no longer wanted women *fédérés*,” that he “was going to find work for them.”<sup>77</sup> Evidently AC’s subjects, two young women in military attire of the Mobiles de la Seine, bayonneted guns in their hands, did not get the memo. (Figure 5.2) These women’s action and dress indicate a resistance to male Commune leadership. They also reveal participation in military activities distinctly disassociated from more-traditional *cantinière* roles. Other women donned uniforms without Cluseret’s permission.

Councils of War later declared women worthy of prison for having worn military clothing during the Commune, even though women had done similarly during the siege. Marie Virginie Vrecq Bedier, 25 during the Commune, had served

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<sup>74</sup> AN/AB XIX 3353/AC, 20.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> This comment may have led AC to these locations, with communardes at Porte Maillot forming a chronologically later subject.

<sup>77</sup> AN/AB XIX 3353/AC, 29. Gustave Paul Cluseret (1823-1900), had participated in the June Days repression in 1848, later serving in the Crimean and Algeria. Decommissioned in 1858, he immigrated to the United States, then recruited for Garibaldi and fought in Italy. Returning to the US, he became a naturalized American and fought for the North during the American Civil War. He returned to France as a journalist in 1867, participating in various revolutionary republican ventures. After serving as Minister of War during the Commune, he was arrested and relieved of his appointed military and elected political posts after 30 April, due to losses at Fort Issy, among other reasons. Rossel temporarily replaced him. Although condemned to death in absentia in 1872, Cluseret had escaped to Switzerland, dressed as a priest. He later became an apologist for his role in the Commune.

as a *cantiniere* in the 170<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the *Vengeurs de Paris* since July 1870, when the war with Prussia began.<sup>78</sup> She retained her post during the Commune, apparently now functioning “as a commander” at the Champs du Mars.<sup>79</sup> She had been “named an officer, a Colonelle,” not because she was the wife of a colonel, but because it had been conferred upon her. During the Commune she wore clothing described as “that of a *marin*.” According to two witnesses who recognized her from her usual military attire, on 23 May, Vrecq Bedier had entered the *mairie* of the XI arrondissement. There she changed out of her uniform into more feminine attire. One witness, Mme Germain, noticed that Vrecq Bedier continued to carry her revolver, as was her habit. Numerous people claimed to have witnessed her exhorting barricade defenders in the I, IV, and XI arrondissements, moving northeast with retreating troops. As a result, her claims of having been home during that week days fell on deaf ears. Authorities questioned her about her siege-era *cantinière* service, segueing immediately into her armed, uniformed presence in the Commune. Vrecq Bedier found herself convicted of, among other counts, “carrying arms and wearing a military uniform in an insurrectional movement.” The paths of AC and Vrecq Bedier may have crossed.

On 27 April, on board the *canonnière*, La Liberté, AC found four armed female sailors who had answered a call for *marins*. (Figure 5.3)<sup>80</sup> Sometime before 7 April, at least some *cantinières* had also received weapons – *fusils chassepots* – as members of National Guard battalions; descriptions of these armed women are

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<sup>78</sup> AN/BB24/(4512.S76), Demande en Grâce, Vrecq Bedier (Marie Virginie).

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> AN/AB XIX 3353/AC, 112.



included in reports of the 206<sup>th</sup> battalion's return from Fort Vincennes.<sup>81</sup> In AC's depictions, one woman carries her gun over her shoulder, hand in her pants pocket, cap ribbons fluttering in the breeze. Her naval attire is distinctly masculine and three communarde comrades, all armed, pose facing the other directions of the compass. A cannon can be seen on board, and the artist identifies the subjects as women – as their dress does not – by his usual attention paid to buttocks, breasts, and earrings. Two other sketches from 27 April reveal similar interests of the artist and activities of women soldiers.<sup>82</sup> In the artist's words, "These dames or *demoiselles* had plenty of gall . . . with language to make even a crocodile shudder." Women answered the call for *postes de combat*, whether as *marins* or otherwise. When they did so, some evidently aligned their speech, dress, attitudes, and association with arms, with traditional military – not feminine – comportment.

The language of these communardes reflects that of club women AC sketched. The disbelief expressed by AC when hearing women's "unbelievable" spoken claims to have "shit in the font" appears tempered when armed women, dressed in military attire, express similar effrontery. AC drew blasphemous club women at St-Pierre de Montrouge on 28 April, discussed in Chapter III, and the foul-mouthed gunlayers of 27 April. However, he did not believe the clubist's claim to have "pissed" and "shit" in the church, because she did not "look like she had the courage to do it."<sup>83</sup> That is, he did not see it. When observing armed women clothed in military uniforms the day

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<sup>81</sup> *La Sociale*, 7 April 1871.

<sup>82</sup> AN/AB XIX 3353/AC, 111, 116.

<sup>83</sup> Chapter III, pg. 242-3 & fnt 179.

before, language that could “make even a crocodile shudder” conflated with their self-presentation in their dress and armed bearing, allowing belief. Masculine bearing, clothing, and weaponry made language believable. Later, police who did not personally witness women’s audacious behavior, nonetheless believed claims against women when their language conflated with masculine bearing, clothing, and association with weaponry. Military authorities had no trouble believing that hero, Marguerite Gainer, *épouse* Lachaise – commended in the newspaper by the 66<sup>th</sup> Battalion – could have “urinat[ed] on the face of M. de Beaufort after he was shot!”<sup>84</sup> When a woman of any age dressed in a uniform and carried a gun, audacious words attributed to her became believable.

In addition to the frequently arrested 40-50-year olds, younger women allied themselves with military activity, and therefore, communarde goals. Among the hundreds of women whose arrests I have recorded, the average and median age is forty-two, though the youngest is fourteen and the oldest, seventy-one. A 30 May 1871 arrest record of Helene Lidonie Pornout, reveals that this 14-year old living at rue des Fourneau 22, came to police attention because of her service on the *canonnières* in the Seine.<sup>85</sup> Although her behavior and foul mouth seem to have provoked police ire in the written record, the location of this young communarde indicates her military participation, as did her attire. Perhaps she, too, was one of those *canonnières* who could “make a crocodile shudder,” as AC believed. In this case, police knew her due to her naval service, indicating the attention women drew

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<sup>84</sup> AN/BB24/759.

<sup>85</sup> APP/Ba 367-1/pf2.

as they served in military capacities. Louise Michel writes of another teenager, this one sent to New Caledonia. Sixteen-year-old, Eugénie Tiffault may have been a family member of another *déporté*, but she endured the penalty of deportation, dying during her stay in the penal colony.<sup>86</sup> Women in military formation continued to draw attention.

On 10 May 1871, AC sketched another group of about eighty non-compliant *communarde* soldiers, uniformed and carrying guns with bayonets extended. Some carry daggers at their sides. (Figure 5.4)<sup>87</sup> All singing the Marseillaise as they marched along the Champs de Mars, AC commented that these troops had not stopped for “one single moment since 4AM this morning.” Describing the scene as a “moving tableau,” AC again mentions his belief that “these are the unemployed women who, in order to eat, become soldiers,” and “who look like the *fédérés*.” AC included only women in his sketch, eventually mentioning they had been following about 20 rag-tag National Guardsmen. This could indicate that women primarily were following the men, and not acting independently. However, in this case, women outnumbered men, appeared stronger and more prominent as they marched, and the artist’s focus remained on them as they paraded on the Champ de Mars. The women’s actions and words dominated the impression left on AC. Additionally, he specifically uses the word, *elles* in describing the group as a whole, in a sense universalizing the term to include the marginalized males. In the written and sketched account, he gives no impression male marchers, singers, or buglers are

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<sup>86</sup> Michel, *Memoirs*, 110.

<sup>87</sup> AN/AB XIX 3353/AC, 110.

around until he notes the National Guardsmen's weakened condition – almost as an afterthought. Even the mention of the women's prolonged singing of the *Marseillaise* indicates AC's impression that the strength of the women dominated the lagging men on the parade grounds. Women who “looked like the *fédérés*” came to trial.

Women's military uniforms gained them attention, bringing them notice from those who would later testify against them. A single woman living on rue Michel Bizot in the XII arrondissement, Marie Louise Paysan wrote her pardon request in 1872.<sup>88</sup> In it, she responds to the accusations associated with her conviction for “wearing a military uniform in an insurrection.” The willingness of courts to take women's military dress into account when accusing them of insurrection implies they viewed women thus dressed as full participants in a political, military insurrection. The Commune never fully recognized women in all military roles, but Versailles took them quite seriously and convicted Paysan. Not married, she had partnered with a man named Durand for a number of years and he was the father of her three children. During the Commune, he served as a *fédéré* in the 122<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the National Guard, in which she also served. During the course of Paysan's Commune participation, she served as a *cantinière* and *ambulancière*, wearing “*un costume de Garde Nationale fédéré*.” Not accused of being armed, her *cantinière* and *ambulancière* service found her in *fédéré* attire, encouraging her conviction. At times, military women who carried side arms, practiced firing them.

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<sup>88</sup> AN/BB24/744, Demande en Grâce, Marie Louise Paysan.

Women's military presence rankled their "superiors" in National Guard ranks as they defied male leadership when presenting themselves for service. On 11 May, AC illustrated, "*Les Amazones*," depicting three women at target practice, all with *képis*, swords, military jackets, and guns. (Figure 5.5)<sup>89</sup> For AC, women marching on 11 May indicated that the three "were not always very skillful" and had "wounded several *fédérés*" and killed one.<sup>90</sup> He mentions again that the Minister of War, Cluseret, had not wanted armed women, but that they nonetheless appeared everywhere, "for the food!"<sup>91</sup> In this rendition, one woman carries her sword in her left hand, while trying to shoot with her right. Although the shooters do not have prominent breasts or wear earrings, all wear long skirts with ruffles at the bottom (red, he says), easily demonstrating their sex category to his audience, even when their actions reject the categorization. Another portrait from that night, informally titled, "*Une Ronde de nuit*," shows a "*Parisienne*" and an "*Alsacienne*" in varying military attire, both armed, and the *Alcacienne* smoking a pipe.<sup>92</sup> The male sergeant on duty appeared not to appreciate the women from "this ignoble race of drunkards," whose presence now challenged his protocol. These mid-May sketches indicate that in some fashion, women drilled as military personnel; continued to participate in the National Guard, despite Cluseret's – and Guardsmen's – desires; and that economic hardship potentially motivated many.

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<sup>89</sup> AN/AB XIX 3353/AC, illeg. #, titled, "*Les Amazones*."

<sup>90</sup> No collaboration yet exists.

<sup>91</sup> By 11 May, Cluseret was no longer in service to the Commune, though AC's comment more likely refers back to his analysis in April.

<sup>92</sup> AN/AB XIX 3353/AC, 56.

Referring to some communardes as “*les femmes artilleurs*,” AC depicts a crew moving a *mitrailleuse* on 19 May, two days before Versailles-sponsored troops breached the city’s gates.<sup>93</sup> A small detailed image of a *mitrailleuse* appears at the bottom of a larger sketch of six women moving one to a new location. (Figure 5.6) They appear to be dressed in regulation sailor uniforms, including boots, as they exert their full weight into the task. Lest their attire and actions conceal their sex, AC again accentuated their breasts, indicating earrings on all. Above the image, he wrote that Commune leadership announced that if “we are vanquished, we will reduce the city to ashes,” requisitioning petrol and other incendiary materials. As he is not quoting the Council directly, the “we” may indicate AC’s occasional sympathies. Other sources verify components of AC’s work.

A photograph mirrors an individual in AC’s sketch of six communardes guarding artillery at Porte Maillot on 19 May, none seeming especially friendly to him. (Figure 5.7)<sup>94</sup> Perhaps following the *canonnières*’ advice of 23 April, AC visited this guarded entrance to the city, sketching and making notes about his visit. He describes thirty-one communardes, “some [dressed] as sailors, others [wore] *kepis*, short petticoats, [and] red belts.” AC does not describe women *as* sailors, but dressing like sailors, implying that, as women, they could only imitate military personnel. Six women appear in this sketch, guarding a cannon aimed outward between barricaded walls, seven to eight feet high. Cannon balls lay piled up in front

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<sup>93</sup> AN/AB XIX 3353/AC, 39.

<sup>94</sup> AN/AB XIX 3353/AC, 19. All or part of the drawing and notes were produced on 19 May. He may have visited the site more than once.

of the women and cannon. Although one communarde in front boldly poses with her hand on her hip, none look directly at the viewer. This pose is virtually identical to one of Clara Fournier, “*pointeuse*,” photographed in the Commune’s aftermath, revealing the likely accuracy of the bravada represented in AC’s sketch. (Figure 5.8)<sup>95</sup>

The artist conversed with at least some of the women, although he also appears not to pursue a substantial rapport, or is unable to because the women do not offer him the information he desires. Noted on this same page is a comment from that date: “While talking with them I learned that some of them were going to work at the rockets. What is that?”<sup>96</sup> Given the discussion, he could have asked them the question, indicating these communardes were not necessarily forthcoming. The guards’ comments may also indicate women’s flexibility in changing jobs when personal interest, economics, or labor demands called them elsewhere. Whether working as formal members of the military or essentially as military-associated day laborers, communardes could leave records.

Women’s association with the National Guard and ambulances generated paper trails, exploited by the police and military as they carried out their arrests after the Commune. In some cases, the Commune used siege-era laws to pay day laborers as part of the National Guard. Though likely not originally intended to aid women, a law of 12 September 1870 allowed the I arrondissement’s 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Company

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<sup>95</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/Fournier, Clara, *pointeuse*; available from <http://www.library.northwestern.edu/spec/siege/images/PAR00668.JPG> ; Internet; accessed on 17 July 2005.

<sup>96</sup> AN/AB XIX 3353/AC, 19.

to pay Victorine Vial for her service as a “guard” on 1 May 1871.<sup>97</sup> As a registered day laborer, she was entitled to the employment and its accompanying pay. National Guard records also enumerate the names and locations of female companions of men. A list for 3 May 1871 shows the names of eighty-eight women receiving payments from the XI arrondissement for their work in the 237<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 6<sup>th</sup> Company.<sup>98</sup> Other records from two arrondissements list 243 women.<sup>99</sup> Ambulance lists, demanded by the police or uncovered in the aftermath, posted names of female victims. In one case from 26 May, a roster includes the names and addresses of two wounded women, Eugénie Monmon and Alexandrine Delarue. Another, Cottin, had died at 9PM that evening.<sup>100</sup> On the same list an unnamed woman is described as having been brought by her Guard compatriots from the barricade at the rue Pecqueur in the XVIII arrondissement.<sup>101</sup> Whether or not women’s injuries contributed to statistics of “wounded insurgents” appearing in *Le Gaulois* on 8 June 1871 is unclear, as no breakdown by sex category was offered; however, “*jeunes gens* under 20,” and “foreigners” received attention.<sup>102</sup> Ambulance records reveal women as objects of

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<sup>97</sup> APP/Ba 368/pf2001-a.

<sup>98</sup> APP/Ba 368/pf3.

<sup>99</sup> APP/Ba 368/pf4.

<sup>100</sup> APP/Ba368/mandats. If Cottin died, as the ambulance record indicates, she is unlikely to appear in records outside of this brief notation. However, without knowing the date this ambulance’s records were carefully examined by police, it is possible that an arrest warrant dated 8 June 1872, issued in the name of “Cottin, femme Fabre, [who] served in [the] artillery” is for the same woman. A post-Commune sentencing photograph of “Reine Cottin” exists, indicating this Cottin was found guilty, but no trial record is currently available. NWU/Siege of Paris/ “Reine Cottin”; available at <http://www.library.northwestern.edu/spec/siege/images/PAR00678.JPG> ; Internet; accessed on 17 July 2005.

<sup>101</sup> APP/Ba369/pf5. Barricades fell, generally from the southwest, where troops entered, to the northeast, as communardes retreated towards strongholds of the popular classes. This meant that battles – if not executions – ended in parts of the city, while still raging elsewhere.

<sup>102</sup> APP/Ba367-1/“Documents relatifs aux personnes tuées ou blessées pendant l’insurrection communale de Paris.”



weaponry, but also that police eventually took possession of information disclosing likely participants. In the wake of the Commune, police rounded up National Guard and ambulance records, evidently finding them potentially useful in locating presumed participants. Women who oversaw municipal ambulances commented on their experiences as they received wounded daily.

Geneviève Bréton's 18 May entry describes the attitudes of the women in her ambulance and her efforts to clean soldiers' blackened hands, which later indicted many. She had worked at the ambulance among other women virtually non-stop for almost a month. Bréton promoted the honor of those in her service. She wrote, "The women at the ambulance station, most of them cheerful, [are] anxious to experience strong emotions, dutiful in the presence of doctors, prodigiously resilient in the face of terrible sights, eager indeed to see them, and enduring them as naturally as smelling a flower." (sic)<sup>103</sup> She notes later in the day that she has "a room of 20 beds that are constantly occupied. Newcomers replace those who die."<sup>104</sup> When she does leave for home, those in the beds, "hold out their blackened hands! [She has] soaped and washed them in vain; nothing will remove the powder stains" gained from firing the artillery and guns and handling gunpowder.<sup>105</sup> Her description reveals why Versailles troops checked Malenfant Rouchy's hands as she traversed the city as a *gamin*, but also the limited usefulness of denying one's association with weaponry – whether male or female. When Fetrige wrote that women were summarily shot

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<sup>103</sup> Allen, *The Diary of Geneviève Bréton*, 195.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

during the last week, “the proofs of their guilt having been established,” blackened hands contributed to the “proof.” Bloody Week began at the Saint-Cloud gate in the XVI arrondissement.

With much of Paris still surrounded by Prussian troops, the *Versaillais* bombarded Paris from the southwest, where eventually, troops carefully indoctrinated over the past two months entered, bringing a revolutionary experiment to a close.<sup>106</sup> Troops came into the city through the communarde-perceived treachery of amateur spy, Ducatel.<sup>107</sup> Seeing an opportunity, Ducatel waved a white handkerchief from Saint-Cloud, gaining the attention of national troops.<sup>108</sup> Force destroyed the gate and troops entered at about 2PM on 21 May. The XVI arrondissement was likely the least sympathetic to communardes, although non-church-affiliated clubs, military drills, and barricades all appeared there. Additionally, Prussian forces were concentrated elsewhere around the perimeter of the city, leaving this area open for Versailles-led assaults. This point clarifies why women’s frontline military involvement prior to Bloody Week centered on forts in this region, rather than in locations closer to traditional workers’ strongholds. Given this geographical consideration, women

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<sup>106</sup> Robert Tombs’, *The Paris Commune 1871* and *The War Against Paris 1871* provide accounts of the military tactics and assault. The Prussians still occupied areas around Paris, actually lending support to Thiers’ goals, for their own purposes. Additionally, Thiers had earlier brokered deals that freed the bulk of French POWs for this assault. Military commanders also worked hard to use troops from the provinces, who were less likely to support Parisian interests, and therefore be less likely to fraternize, as had occurred on 18 March.

<sup>107</sup> Ducatel is routinely referred to by this singular name. An outside concert in behalf of widows and children was the site at which many became aware of the troops’ entrance. Troops had amassed at gates in the southwestern sectors of the city. Though they had done so previously without ultimate success, the St. Cloud gate fell quickly this time. Some accounts explain that it was unguarded on that day.

<sup>108</sup> For this act, he was named *Chevalier de la Légion d’honneur*, and *le Figaro* began a subscription to award him 100,000 francs.

going to and from these battlefronts likely were somewhat common sites for those disinclined to support the Commune. Once in the city, according to more than one recent historian, troops engaged in a “savage repression of *le peuple* in the name of civilization [that] lay at the heart of France’s Third Republic.”<sup>109</sup>

Though marginalizing women’s roles, Robert Tombs concludes that the war effort against the Paris Commune was “one of the first instances of truly systematic political slaughter in modern Europe.”<sup>110</sup> As described previously, police and military officials later listed women and men as “political detainees,” but Tombs’ description of events as “political” may have contributed to his reduction of women’s significance, given that he excludes disenfranchised women from that term.

Understandably, leaders at Versailles consistently refused to articulate the revolution as a political event (or slaughter). Without no discourse aligning the revolution with politics, troops could pursue the “criminals who lacked any moral sense,” as they saw it, with little, if any, restraint.<sup>111</sup> Women could be criminal – and therefore targets – even when excluded from political categories. Ultimately, with 877 Versailles troops killed and perhaps 30,000 Parisians dead, restraint was not the order of the day.

Tombs writes that Bloody Week was “the most deadly and destructive few days in the history of Paris, the most ferocious outbreak of civil violence in Europe between the

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<sup>109</sup> For the two most recent descriptions, see, Alice Bullard, *Exile to Paradise: Savagery and Civilization in Paris and the South Pacific, 1790-1900* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 72. Bertrand Taithe comments similarly in *Defeated Flesh: Welfare, Warfare and the Making of Modern France* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 43, 237. This frequently-mentioned point remains significantly unexamined, especially in terms of the Third Republic’s conclusion.

<sup>110</sup> Tombs, *The Paris Commune 1871*, 10.

<sup>111</sup> Bullard, *Exile to Paradise*, 67.

French Revolution . . . and the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.”<sup>112</sup> Indeed, Juliette Lamber Adam wrote about those days, “In terrible times like these, opinions become crimes,” crimes worthy of death.<sup>113</sup> However, scholars consistently have failed to analyze women’s participation and their place in the violent repression when reaching conclusions about the significance of Bloody Week in modern European history. Certain factors also separate the violence of May 1871 from that of 1789, 1830, or 1848.

Militarily, the Commune remains unique among Paris uprisings with which it is often compared, demonstrating as well that conservative fears were, perhaps, especially warranted. As with the military follies of 18 March, the final week of the Commune reveals flaws in earlier government planning. As William Fetridge states, “the large avenues created during imperial rule assumed only the government would have artillery during insurrections.”<sup>114</sup> However, “the insurgents possessed cannon – indeed a great many of them – together with mitrailleuses of every size and description,” making Bloody Week a different sort of fight.<sup>115</sup> Fetridge somewhat excuses the carnage by adding, “it consequently became very difficult to take barricades thus defended without an enormous loss of life.”<sup>116</sup> His argument also divulges that communardes put up a significant fight, ultimately overwhelmed by sheer numbers and mass slaughter. Although ultimately outmaneuvered and outflanked, communarde fighters employed every tactic and weapon at their disposal.

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<sup>112</sup> Tombs, *The Paris Commune 1871*, 10.

<sup>113</sup> Lamber Adam, *Mes angoisses et nos luttes*, 136.

<sup>114</sup> Fetridge, *The Rise and Fall of the Paris Commune*, 302.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

These included artillery, firearms, barricades, appeals to Republic troops – successful on 18 March, hand-to-hand combat, guerrilla warfare, and street-to-street (even housetop-to-housetop) fighting. Communardes set fires to slow or halt Versailles progress – or to annihilate property and its contents. Women provided substantial frontline engagement, as the battle for the Commune became an urban war in which the battlefield was synonymous with the homefront. Malenfant Rouchy's experiences reveal women's engagement in the fighting as the Commune came to an end.

Daily, Victorine Malenfant Rouchy went to the frontlines while her husband provided food service further from the front, inverting gender roles considerably. Prior to Bloody Week, she noted that due to her husband's drinking, he had proved less useful, now in a more limited service in food provisioning. She continued to go "to the ramparts with [her] friends; each day having the dead and wounded to pick up."<sup>117</sup> Her camaraderie and alliance with her male and female workmates is pronounced. Although lacking a full complement of personnel, she continued working, sometimes with a strength and endurance beyond what she thought herself capable. She heaved big men up on stretchers, into transportation, and onto beds<sup>118</sup> At this point she first mentions her small stature. Her size will unexpectedly serve her well when she transforms herself into a boy, due to her inability to fit into larger women's attire without drawing attention to herself.<sup>119</sup> Although claiming to have

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<sup>117</sup> Brocher, *Souvenirs*, 185.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 185-6.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 186, 202-15.

spent a good deal of time in her life quiet and sick, she found her voice and strength, though perhaps exaggerating her vigor somewhat in the retelling.<sup>120</sup> She wrote, “over eight months of fighting, exposed to all miseries, inclement weather, and lacking all basic necessities, never was I as healthy as during this period.”<sup>121</sup> In the course of her duties on 21 May, she hears of the entry of Versailles troops into Paris.<sup>122</sup> With its proximity to the troops’ original port of entry in the XVI arrondissement, Passy swiftly became the target of the first ambulance purges.

Memoirs by three women, not all communardes, testify to ambulances invaded by massacring troops. At Passy, soldiers invaded the ambulance, “guided by Christian sentiment,” Malenfant Rouchy sarcastically intoned, “finishing off the wounded.”<sup>123</sup> This reflects a report by Mme de Pressensé, in which she described the fate of one of her former patients who “was shot when leaving the ambulance.”<sup>124</sup> She saw a Protestant pastor meet the same fate. Geneviève Bréton arrived at her ambulance station on 25 May,

arranging . . . men as they had been before, that is, as well as I could. That they may be shot later is beyond my control. But as long as they are subject to my rules, they remain my wounded. And like prisoners of war, they are entitled to care and respect. This morning the sight of these sick, abandoned men . . . was dreadful. And making my way here was a grisly martyrdom. Before our very windows, stragglers were being arrested and shot behind the barricades without a trial!<sup>125</sup>

Ambulances offered no safety from “grisly martyrdom,” though Bréton apparently

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<sup>120</sup> Given that one of her points in writing the memoir was to contradict men who condemned women’s participation – and the “type” of women they were – she may have recollected her strength or prior weakness to a greater degree than was technically accurate – or not. She recounted a toothache and numbing cold during the siege, but never mentions a history of weakness or illness at that point.

<sup>121</sup> Brocher, *Souvenirs*, 186.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>124</sup> IISH/Descaves 45/Lettres de Mme de Pressensé, 711.

<sup>125</sup> Allen, *In the Solitude of My Soul*, 202.

attempted to keep “[her] wounded” safe for as long as possible.

The outcome for those taken away or otherwise encountered by *Versillais* appears to be common knowledge, though Bréton attempted an act of resistance. Bréton continued to see men she previously cared for, often under circumstances her own work defied. She wrote of the final week of May and the week following:

I’ve seen unspeakable things in a state of silent and despairing revulsion . . . Several times I shouted my indignation to the soldiers, but their agitation is so impassioned they heard nothing – and yet! All the same, out of a hundred guilty, it takes . . . only one innocent man to be condemned, for their pretended fairness to become crime and injustice.<sup>126</sup>

In this case, Bréton actively attempted to resist the brutalities carried out, but to no avail. Given the ferocity of the violence, it is not clear how she avoided arrest or death. Fetrige, too, commented on the passions of *Versillais*: “The death-struggle of the Commune . . . ended in exciting greatly the passions of the soldiers, and rendering them more cruel in their retaliation.”<sup>127</sup> Describing where some end up after her care, as well as her impotence, Bréton condemningly states,

State prison, something horrific, a dreadful staging point between the arrival from freedom, sunshine, and the departure only for death. Most of these men we’re caring for are condemned to death, and this thought never leaves me for an instant while I’m with them. And their wounds are scarcely even healed before they’re snatched out of our hands. Why struggle to preserve a life only to see it destroyed?<sup>128</sup>

Having watched a column of these prisoners, she concluded, “This morning a procession of more than a hundred was marched off to Versailles. Among them were courageous, thoroughly honorable men I knew and appreciated after weeks of daily

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Fetrige, *The Rise and Fall of the Paris Commune in 1871*, 323.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 204. Hardouin comments similarly in *Détenue de Versailles en 1871*, 61-2, about the women in prison, noting that, “Each day sent some of my poor companions to the infirmary. Although there was a doctor at Chantiers . . . the results were less than zero . . . some women were going to die due to the care.” Hardouin describes the common practice of locating the cemetery next to the hospital, as was the case at Chantiers.

attention.”<sup>129</sup> Her daily, intimate connections with wounded men encouraged her to see a larger picture than her class status, in itself, might have allowed. These passages also display Bréton’s continued efforts, aiding those presently in the battle. *Versillais* tactics however, generally nullified those efforts.

Bréton was not alone in intimating that inability to survive wounds and conditions was virtually a part of *Versillais* military plans. Bréton watched soldiers “leave, starving, in rags, with no *képis* to temper the sun, with no sticks to support unmended limbs, with no shoes against the stony road! Most of them will collapse from thirst, fatigue, and exhaustion, but they will have to march on, shackled to criminals and treated as such.”<sup>130</sup> Georges Bourgin wrote that poor medical treatment killed 1,179 (male) prisoners in the hands of Versailles authorities.<sup>131</sup> His accounting method remains unclear and he indicated no correlating effects on women prisoners. Scenes like those witnessed by Bréton moved a writer for *The New York Times* to report on 25 May that, “The wars of the dynasties were bad enough, but they had for the most part a merely human badness about them. This latest mode of warfare is simply fiendish.”<sup>132</sup> Women were in the midst of this “fiendish” war; their medical service often easily identified them as participants.

The identifying *ambulancière* armband could not successfully shield a woman from post-Commune prosecution for now-illegal acts. Marie Miquet Parfond, born shortly after June Days in 1848, was sentenced to five years of solitary confinement

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<sup>129</sup> Allen, *In the Solitude of My Soul*, 204.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Bourgin/Henriot, *Procès verbaux de la Commune*, 185. Number also cited in Milliet, *Une famille de républicaines fouriéristes*, 115.

<sup>132</sup> *The New York Times* (25 May 1871), 4.



with hard labor on charges of pillage in connection with the insurrection.<sup>133</sup>

Witnesses described her as wearing an ambulance armband, even while performing other activities, including delivering stolen goods.<sup>134</sup> Allegedly, her reason for having participated in taking these particular items was due to the owner's refusal to serve in the National Guard. He and his wife had escaped, but, Miquet Parfond had supposedly indicated, "his grocery [in the XX arrondissement] won't, and we are going to take all his merchandise and give it to the poor who have nothing."<sup>135</sup>

Evidently residents of "working-class districts" did not always consider themselves allied with the Commune. As in other cases, Miquet Parfond's argument also rested on the unfairness of her husband risking himself when others remained out of harm's way. According to one witness, Miquet Parfond argued that people remained in need and as her husband was serving in the Guard, she believed the requisitioning fair.

The witness's articulation of Miquet Parfond's argument implies one of two possibilities. The person had either a great degree of familiarity with communarde arguments, which are then perhaps inappropriately ascribed to Miquet Parfond, or gave a fairly accurate recounting of what Miquet Parfond said, despite her denial. Miquet Parfond continued to swear that she was attached only to the ambulance at Ménilmontant and never left it; she agreed that she habitually wore an armband, but had never taken part in pillage nor entered the boutique. However, requisitioned material had been found in her residence at the time of her arrest, leaving her

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<sup>133</sup> AN/BB24/756, Demande en Grâce, Femme Parfond, Marie Joséphine née Miquet.

<sup>134</sup> AN/BB24/756/, Demande en Grâce, Femme Parfond, Marie Joséphine née Miquet, Rapport of 25 Octobre 1872.

<sup>135</sup> While she did admit to requisitioning items from the store – not to pillage – this quote is not hers.

statement not easily defensible, even if the supplies could have been planted, something she never suggested. Secondly, ambulance service appears to have kept few, if any, women consistently within the confines of their units, decreasing the chance that point would be valid. Lastly, by the end of the Commune, the armed aggression of some *ambulancières* had received public notice, disallowing a clear line between medical care and other Commune activities. Women such as Marie Jeanne Bouquet Lucas had entered requisitioned churches to sign women up for ambulance service, in which Bouquet Lucas participated.<sup>136</sup> Pillage and requisition divided along partisan rhetorical lines only. The justification attributed to Miquet Parfond in the documents suggests that, as a communarde, she may very well have made those claims.

Miquet Parfond's supposed declaration coincides with Commune discourse and demonstrates an analytical consistency with Melanie Jacques Gauthier. Requisitioning of churches and from those who left the city appears ubiquitous and sanctioned by Commune discourse and practice, as was arresting those hiding police and draft-dodgers.<sup>137</sup> Women's recurrent justifications for requisitions and arrests centered on whether the act was just, according to Commune standards. These moments demonstrate a certain alignment with Commune discourse, even if the actions of an individual might have included additional motives. Chapter III quoted

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<sup>136</sup> Analyzed in Chapter III. AN/BB24/746 Lucas (Marie Jeanne) Bouquet, Demande en Grâce in letter she wrote for clemency, dated 5 July 1874.

<sup>137</sup> The communarde logic often expressed in arresting those associated with hiding police was their unwillingness to serve in the National Guard, not their association with the police, per se. While animosity was clearly expressed towards police, the legal aspect of what they were doing of a criminal nature, was shirking National Guard duty. Women tended to integrate points relevant to the unfairness of their male associates risking their lives; all should share in the risk equally.

Melanie Jacques, *femme* Gauthier defending herself a year after the Commune: “Taking the government of the Commune for a legal government, [I] believed denouncing *la femme* Zehr was an act of patriotism.”<sup>138</sup> Miquet Parfond and Jacques Gauthier may have attempted to shield themselves behind “higher authorities” – certainly a traditional logic in other contexts. However, they may have simply believed their arguments were justified since their actions merged perfectly with Commune discourse and practice. Wearing an ambulance armband could mark women as guilty specifically of armed actions.

The arrest and trial records of Marie Cailleux and Marie Wolff, *femme* Guyard indicate the role of *ambulancière* armbands in arrests and convictions. Their story also reveals the ways police and other officials could position women against each other after their arrests.<sup>139</sup> A day laborer, twenty-year-old Cailleux received deportation to a walled fortification “for having born arms in an insurrectional movement, having made use of her weapons under the same circumstances, and having, in an insurrectional movement, made or helped make barricades.” She wrote her own petition for clemency. Marie Wolff Guyard, twenty-one and an *ambulancière* during the Commune, received the death penalty, later reduced to deportation, for having “helped make barricades, having been found complicit in the assassinations of 27 May,” resulting in the deaths of four priests, and for “having

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<sup>138</sup> AN/BB24/756/, Demande en Grâce, Femme Parfond, Marie Joséphine née Miquet, Rapport of 25 Octobre 1872.

<sup>139</sup> These are found together in AN/BB24/747 (#4186 S. 72), attached with (#6314 S. 72), Demande en Grâce for Cailleux (Marie); Rapports for Wolff, Marie, femme Guyard. Hardouin’s account also reveals how police attempted to play women off against each other.

helped the authors of the action.” (Figure 5.9)<sup>140</sup> They both gave their accounts of the assassinations, attempting to clarify their own involvement. Witnesses declared that an *ambulancière* had shot at least one of the hostages, although who that *ambulancière* was remained a question for a while – and possibly still. However, the record clarifies that for this era marking the beginning of a Republic, being female or tending wounded in no way helped one disavow violent or military acts, bringing women within government purview in perhaps unprecedented ways.<sup>141</sup>

Wolff Guyard was easily-discernable as an *ambulancière* due to her armband, but could not positively be identified by one of the witnesses as *the ambulancière* who had led a procession and participated in this shooting. Between May 1871, when witnesses had watched the *ambulancière*, and a year later during the trial, neither Cailleux nor Wolff Guyard maintained their former appearance, prison having treated them poorly, as Céleste Hardouin’s account suggests for so many. This point also divulges that accusations against women came from people who did not necessarily know them by name, but claimed to have observed their actions and heard their words. Back on 27 May 1871, however, a recaptured hostage, in vain tried to flee and then defended himself. Engaging the *ambulancière* in a building nearby, he

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<sup>140</sup> Wolff Guyard’s photograph is in NWU/Siege of Paris/ “Marie Guyord, femme Wolff” (sic); available from <http://www.library.northwestern.edu/spec/siege/images/PAR00651.JPG> ; Internet; accessed on 17 July 2005. The Commune had taken prisoners primarily from among priests and police, hoping for exchanges or leverage. However, as Versailles’ attitude was one of “Too bad for the hostages!” uttered by Thiers’ secretary, Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire, they remained imprisoned. During the final days, a total of 56 were killed. Among them were 11 priests, 35 gendarmes, and 4 “*ancien mouchards de l’Empire*,” according to Bernard Noël, *Dictionnaire de la Commune*, 279-80.

<sup>141</sup> Post-Commune procedures systematically employed photography for the first time in keeping track of condemned persons. Therefore, women associated with the Commune likely became the first women whose police photos could identify them for future surveillance or arrests.

“begged for pity of the *ambulancière* who [then] threatened him with her pistol.”<sup>142</sup>

He did not receive pity. According to a witness, “the [unidentified] *ambulancière*,” who had been busy taking care of someone’s wound in a hallway at 130 Boulevard Voltaire, had shouted to *fédérés*,

‘No pity! If you don’t shoot them, I’ll take care of business!’ Waving a *drapeau rouge* at the head of those escorting [the hostages] to death, she discharged her revolver on one of the first three victims; when [the fourth] was brought back . . . begging for mercy from her, as he was the father of a family, she said, ‘You ask me for the fat! Listen! I’m going to give you the lean!’ She tried to shoot her revolver . . . then to hit him with her dagger, but the [male] *fédérés* separated them and shot him.

Wolff Guyard, however, claimed to be at home. Two other witnesses said differently.

One witness, *femme* Beaucote, was also arrested, but for theft, now finding it useful, with Cailleux, to testify against Wolff Guyard. Their former alliance under the rubric of the Commune was broken. While both were in jail, Beaucote saw Wolff Guyard. She supposedly recognized the accused from her present attire, which Beaucote claimed Wolff Guyard had worn the day of the assassination of the hostages.<sup>143</sup> Beaucote affirmed she saw Wolff Guyard marching at the head of the procession with a *drapeau rouge*, having stated to others, “if you don’t do it, I will take care of this.” Marie Cailleux, now the third witness of three, declared that she recognized Wolff Guyard as the *ambulancière* “who took the four hostages to their death.” She saw her with “a *drapeau rouge* in her hand, threatening the hostages with

<sup>142</sup> AN/BB24/747 (#4186 S. 72), attached with (#6314 S. 72), Demande en Grâce for Cailleux (Marie); Rapports for Wolff, Marie, femme Guyard.

<sup>143</sup> The visible clothing worn by Wolff Guyard in her post-condemnation prison photo is identical to that worn by Marie Ménard in NWU/Siege of Paris/ “Marie Menan” (sic); available from <http://www.library.northwestern.edu/spec/siege/images/PAR00654.JPG> ; Internet; accessed on 17 July 2005. These photos and others indicate that this practice was common, though the reasons for it remain unclear. I also do not know whether the potentially similar clothing women wore is relevant to Beaucote’s “identification” of Wolff Guyard.

her revolver and pushing them from time to time to make them move on and saying to them, ‘*Marchez donc! Marchez donc!*’” As she passed before Cailleux, Wolff Guyard supposedly spoke directly to her, stating, “*En voilà encore 4 de moins!*” Cailleux had been implicated in the crime, but claimed to have only been in her doorway nearby, from where she heard Wolff Guyard. Crossing herself when she saw the hostages’ bodies drew Cailleux to the attention of some *fédérés*. Due to her pious act, they suggested that she might be aligned with the *sergents de ville*.

Not admitting to shooting hostages, during the fighting Cailleux acknowledged carrying ammunition in her pockets, indicating her *ambulancière* armband did not isolate her from weaponry. Witnesses testified she routinely carried a gun in a holster; she claimed to have only “helped the National Guards reload their guns.” Neither point disassociated her from ammunition and war materiel.<sup>144</sup> During the construction of the barricade at rue de la Roquette in the XI arrondissement, Cailleux claimed only to give “food and drink to the workers, her establishment being nearby.”<sup>145</sup> She had since taken refuge with her family at Montmorency, where she had been arrested on 19 July 1871. Often having a year or more to bring a woman to trial, police maneuvered women against each other, although at one point, they had occupied the same side of a broad issue. By definition, a woman’s *ambulancière* armband associated them with military actions. Whether carrying a pistol or

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<sup>144</sup> AN/BB24/747 (#4186 S. 72), attached with (#6314 S. 72), Demande en Grâce for Cailleux (Marie); Rapports for Wolff, Marie, femme Guyard.

<sup>145</sup> Cailleux’s archival files indicate she was partnered with a man named, Lebailleux, who had been called to service during the Franco-Prussian War. He had evidently left his business in her hands. Although “already having relations with” Lebailleux, some witnesses stated that she “came to use the name, Jamot, during the Commune, suggesting that during those weeks, she may have partnered with someone else – or that some worked hard to discourage Lebailleux’s continuing support of her.

ammunition, or working near equipment behind barricades, women's proximity to war materiel linked them to guilt. They could not disassociate themselves by saying they were forced into National Guard duty, as some men attempted. Victorine Malenfant Rouchy continued to work with her National Guard unit into Bloody Week.

While communarde military attire was not always identical to men's, at least some communardes functioned as fully-integrated members of National Guard units. Their usefulness was not delineated by gendered attire. During the last week, Malenfant Rouchy had her first contact with Louise Michel. Her memoir clarifies that she had not previously met Michel, reasoning that she had never attended a club and was not in the Vigilance Committee of the XVIII arrondissement, where Michel frequented.<sup>146</sup> According to Malenfant Rouchy, Michel was dressed in attire often described in AC's sketches: a *képi*, reformulated National Guard jacket, and a skirt.<sup>147</sup> Identical clothing reveals itself in photographs of communardes such as Louise Bonenfant. (Figure 5.10)<sup>148</sup> The published commendation from the 66<sup>th</sup> Battalion for Marguerite Gaïnder, *épouse* Lachaise indicates at least some women were well-integrated into their units, but observers like AC often noted the gendered aspects of military women's attire. This notation singles out women as particular, rather than universal examples of military service during the Commune. However, Malenfant Rouchy repeatedly noted her alliance with "friends" in her unit, most of whom were

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<sup>146</sup> Brocher, *Souvenirs*, 190.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Photograph found in NWU/Siege of Paris/"Louise Bonenfant"; available from <http://www.library.northwestern.edu/spec/siege/images/PAR00684.JPG> ; Internet; accessed on 17 July 2005.

male.<sup>149</sup> When functioning in military capacities, she does not articulate her work as separate from that of men within the unit. By the end of 23 May as communardes retreated into the XI arrondissement, she had rediscovered two of her friends – artillerymen – at the barricade at the place de la Bastille and the rue Saint-Antoine. She found that everyone in their unit who had tried to get to Passy to help with its defense had been made prisoner or shot; her unit members thought her husband among the dead.<sup>150</sup> Not venturing outside her house during Bloody Week, Charlotte Ritchie had a different source of information.

Ritchie revealed to friends that the indefatigable Félicie brought her news of the troops entering Paris and kept her posted during the fighting; she also suggested greater causes of Parisian fires than *pétroleuses*. “Writing with closed shutters,” with “cannon firing inside of Paris,” Ritchie reported that at 7AM on 22 May, Félicie rushed in to tell her the news of the troops’ entrance.<sup>151</sup> For those remaining in their homes, women who transgressed the boundaries of public and private continued to provide information, as they had since 18 March when Goncourt wrote, “the bread woman said there is fighting in Montmartre.” Indicating that fires were a concern due to the artillery and gunfire, she writes during the bombardment that, “Félicie and I have packed our plate and jewels ready to fly in case of fire, else I think we are safer here.”<sup>152</sup> Another woman now in Ritchie’s household, Mme Poussellieque, older and fairly deaf, “goes calmly on with her work, rather despising my precautions in case of

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<sup>149</sup> Brocher, *Souvenirs*, 195.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Charlotte Ritchie, *A Memoir*, 36.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.



fire,” as, due to her hearing impairment, she believed the cannon to be at Mt Valerien, miles away.<sup>153</sup> On 23 May, artillery duels raged nearby. Ritchie exposed her concern about the buildings and churches in her area, although her street in the VIII arrondissement was now in Versailles hands. Reiterating the likely culprits of most Paris fires and destruction, she mentions that, “The cannon strike oftener the innocent houses . . . than the barricades.”<sup>154</sup> Ritchie continued to gain information from Félicie and her sources, writing as troops advanced on her street, “Félicie has been told these are *real* soldiers so I trust we have little to fear.” (Emphasis in original.)<sup>155</sup> She closed a letter for 23 May by saying, “May god have pity on poor Paris, and make this as bloodless a victory as possible.”<sup>156</sup> Her prayer remained unfilled. Although artillery contributed to many fires in Paris, individual communardes also played a role.

The particular locations and groupings of some fires indicate arson as a component of at least some of the fires. Prussian troops still surrounded the walls of northeastern working-class districts. Therefore, southeastern *quartiers* had received the brunt of bombardment from outside the city walls prior to 21 May, affecting many residences. With the troops’ entrance and movement through the southwestern neighborhoods, sappers, artillery, and rooftop exchanges further damaged this sector.<sup>157</sup> Relatively few Bloody Week fires occurred, however, until troops began penetrating further into the city with the ferocious assaults of 23 and 24 May. By the

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>157</sup> Tombs, *The War Against Paris 1871*, 124-162 for more detail.

end of 24 May, for the most part, communardes had retreated east of a line running roughly north-south through the XVIII, IV, and XIII arrondissements.<sup>158</sup> Areas east of this line suffered few fires. West of that line, pockets of resistance remained and fires became prevalent during 22 – 25 May. The Palais de Justice, rue de Rivoli, Tuilleries, Thiers' home, police stations, and other structures owned by the rich suffered severe damage.<sup>159</sup> Orders to burn the Hôtel de Ville were signed by members of the Commune's elected Council. These locations suggest targeting of particular areas and structures by retreating communardes, structures that would have been unlikely targets of artillery, though certainly errant shots could do damage. For communardes, a burning Tuilleries or police station was not a symbol of the insanity of their recent efforts, as their detractors believed. Arson was a rational destruction of architecture that traditionally housed their enemies. A preliminary tally of Paris fires for 21-30 May 1871 includes references only in the V, VI, VII, XIV, and XV arrondissements, with 143 structures burning or destroyed by fire.<sup>160</sup> Some locations, such as numerous buildings all along the rues de Lille and du Bac, indicate a progression of fires through the VII arrondissement along the paths of fleeing barricade defenders. (Figure 5.11) AC's sketches imply the same.

On 23 May, prior to an area falling to Versailles troops on 24 May, AC drew women preparing to set fires. Between 9:00 and 10:00 in the morning, AC drew seven women at the intersection of rue de Lille and du Bac in the VII arrondissement,

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 147 for map.

<sup>159</sup> For photographs, see NWU/Siege of Paris/Landscapes and Architecture. Some available from <http://www.library.northwestern.edu/spec/siege/landscapes.html> ; Internet; accessed on 17 July 2005.

<sup>160</sup> NWU/Siege and Commune of Paris/v13/1.1134, Liste des monuments, habitations, établissements détruits ou endommagés par les Indendiaires de la Commune

dressed in various attire of the working classes and prepared to set fires. (Figure 5.12)<sup>161</sup> All gather up their overskirts filled with brushes and more. One woman's bodice displays a cross. Some of the women's ragged petticoats show patches and their head coverings indicate a range of positions within the popular classes, including domestics. Later at about 6:00 in the evening, AC traveled northward towards the Seine on rue du Bac, mostly on fire, arriving at rue de Verneuil, "which has just been put on fire."<sup>162</sup> He reportedly met two women who "had just burnt the rue de Lille." (Figure 5.13) In his words,

They command up to a dozen children and as many *fédérés* who are pulling a cart filled with petroleum, gasoline, and tar. The women yell to go to the Légion d'Honneur and threaten everyone who refuses to walk with having their brains blown out.

The *Palais de la Légion d'honneur* heads the list of buildings destroyed "*par les incendiaires de la Commune*," indicating assignment of Commune, though not necessarily "*pétroleuses*," responsibility by 30 May.<sup>163</sup> AC presents the two women with mouths open, shouting their orders, no men or children in sight. Both have their skirts rolled up, holding brushes and pots; their underskirts are shorter and more ragged than his earlier subjects, appearing torn around the lower edge.<sup>164</sup> Each

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<sup>161</sup> AN/AB XIX 3353/67. Although the larger AN fond that includes AC's drawings is listed in the bibliography, Gay Gullickson's, *Unruly Women*, does not discuss these sketches residing in the AN or at NWU. However, AC's drawings do not reflect the type of published representational images, on which Gullickson focuses.

<sup>162</sup> AN/AB XIX 3353/68.

<sup>163</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/v13/1.1134, Liste des monuments, habitations, établissements détruits ou endommagés par les Indendiaires de la Commune

<sup>164</sup> Undergarments provided a way for a woman to improvise when fabric was needed for other items, at times leaving the shortest underskirts on those whose needs were most desperate. Bandages, an infant's clothes, diapers, cloth for menstrual needs, or even (dyed) red sashes or ribbons could all come from a woman's underclothing. Additionally, the poorer the woman, the longer her clothes had to suffice, in this case also suggesting that the hems of dresses and undergarments could also receive harsher wear from the bottom, up, given the length of women's dresses in the era. My impression is

carries a gun in one hand, while supporting the tools of the *pétroleuse* “trade” with the other. On 25 May, AC drew children associated with such acts as co-recipients of death.

Five children – two girls and three boys – fill the scene behind the barricade at the corner of rue du Bac and de Lille, in the hands of *Versillais* by 25 May. (Figure 5.14)<sup>165</sup> AC comments that they “had been stopped and shot at this place for having tried to set fire to the *Moniteur Universel*” and their executioners accused them of having done likewise to “the *Conseil d’Etat* and to the houses on rue de Lille that now burned.” Perhaps to make his point, a bucket of brushes sits next to the head of one of the girls, and two other boys hold brushes in their hands, though it is unlikely they could do so in post-execution death. Elsewhere on the page, AC comments that according to Versailles troops, this act of summary execution was to be an example. In the circumstances of this urban warfare, no innocents remained. In an atmosphere in which troops entered all buildings, “disarmed” the population of weapons – antique or of more recent invention – and arrested or summarily shot those deemed guilty of bearing arms, possession of fuel and flame merged many into categories of “armed.”<sup>166</sup> Malenfant Rouchy, presenting herself as a child, not only had her hands checked for evidence, but observed the bodies of children in the streets.

Malenfant saw children killed by *Versillais* and outrageous acts committed against them after their deaths. In one case, when dressed as *gamin* Malenfant

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that most men would not be aware of the condition of these women’s garments unless they saw them. This point may lend additional credibility to AC.

<sup>165</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/Etchings/pf1 (AC), 119. Tombs, *The War Against Paris 1871*, 147.

<sup>166</sup> For “disarmament,” Tombs, *The War Against Paris 1871*, 165-168.

Rouchy, she witnessed a mother of six pleading for the life of a teenage son. She appealed to the soldiers as a mother, but did so in vain. They granted her son a last wish – something to drink – and his mother brought him a glass of wine from the cabaret across the street. He raised his glass, shouted, “Vive la Commune!” and announced himself ready to die after embracing his mother one last time.<sup>167</sup> With his hands behind his back of his own accord, he was shot. Near the *mairie* of the XX arrondissement, Malenfant Rouchy then witnessed “horrific” things, many of which she did not repeat in her memoir. However, she describes of a pile of dead bodies, on top of which was “a poor little lass no more than eight years old, pretty, with blond curls.”<sup>168</sup> A soldier “had the monstrous idea to lift the skirts of the poor thing up to her chest.”<sup>169</sup> Malenfant asks, “To what level of bestiality have these soldiers fallen?”<sup>170</sup> The bodies of children and women accompanied those of men during the final defense of the Commune.

The line between the history of armed communardes and the mythology of “*pétroleuses*” blurs profoundly within one of AC’s sketches. At about 6:00am on 25 May in front of the Conseil d’Etat, AC drew flames and smoke billowing, with seven bodies lined up.<sup>171</sup> In this sketch, National Guard bodies occupy the foreground with a woman among them. The male body closest to the viewer holds a dagger; the woman clutches a pail. “*Petrole*” can be read on one of the barrels behind the bodies,

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<sup>167</sup> Brocher, *Souvenirs d’une morte vivante*, 212.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> NWU/Siege and Commune of Paris/Etchings/ pfl (AC), 120.

but in front of the flames. The skirt-covered legs of the woman – as Alexandre Dumas could now call her – are depicted as spread further apart than all the other uniformed soldiers in the same drawing. She lays perpendicular to the males' bodies, drawing particular attention for the viewer. This image recalls the *pétroleuses* – and for some, their just rewards. Yet, AC's depictions of fire starters on the streets typically presented them as such. Here, it is only implied: she lies among National Guard soldiers and her wooden bucket could have held water to quench thirst or cool artillery. Five women received death sentences, later commuted to life deportation, for their alleged incendiary activities; other women received their "sentences" on street corners in May. However, as Edith Thomas described, all women participants became brushed with the epithet. Men became known as socialist revolutionaries, women, as hysterical arsonists.<sup>172</sup> Although perhaps not this artist's intent, the fact that such a woman lays dead was also argued as appropriate, as the initial judicial death sentences validate. Women's association with arson during the Commune's last week was not the only evidence that could condemn them to death.

The crime that supposedly brought Marie-Jeanne Gourier, *née* Moussu to the attention of authorities was her attempt – three weeks after the Commune's demise – to "burn the home of her lover."<sup>173</sup> Her "lover" now denounced her to police, and later, at trial. Moussu Gourier, a forty-one-year-old *blanchisseuse*, was initially

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<sup>172</sup> Gay Gullickson's, *Unruly Women of Paris* demonstrates the latter point, with Alice Bullard in *Exile to Paradise*, 72, noting about the men, "From the 1880s onward, having participated in the Commune was a badge of honor [for men]."

<sup>173</sup> AN/BB24/741, Gourier Marie-Jeanne, *née* Moussu. See, NWU/Siege of Paris/V10 1.805 available from <http://www.library.northwestern.edu/spec/siege/docs/PAR00956.htm> ; Internet; accessed on 17 July 2005.

condemned to death for arson in the Commune's aftermath. Separated from her husband, Moussu Gourier held "*communistes*" tracts in her possession when arrested at her home.<sup>174</sup> With the tracts discovered in her residence, "*on la fait passer pour incendiaire*," especially with her ex's accusation. Her unofficial name, noted on at least one sentencing photograph, was "*Le Moussu*," possibly indicating facial hair, but in any event likely pejorative, despite the association with one of her birth names.<sup>175</sup> Women's fire-setting, or presumed fire-setting, could condemn them to death, even if the "verifiable" attempt occurred weeks after the Commune.<sup>176</sup> For police – and likely Moussu Gourier's former companion – "communist" sympathies, distain for a lover's poor treatment, and arson, could easily conflate, whether or not they actually did in life. Commune sympathies led some women to their death on many of the over-150 barricades defending Paris in every arrondissement.<sup>177</sup>

Women's bodies appeared behind barricades and among the dead during the last week of the dissolving Revolution. Before 6:00am on 24 May, AC recorded a

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<sup>174</sup> References to terms similar to "communiste," rather than "communarde," consistently indicate anti-Commune perspectives, no matter the contexts of the descriptions. Communist is not synonymous with communarde.

<sup>175</sup> NWU/Siege of Paris/"Femme Mossu, incendièrè"; available from <http://www.library.northwestern.edu/spec/siege/docs/PAR00657.htm> ; Internet; accessed on 17 July 2005. Indicative of many things is her archival record, which refers to her varyingly as, femme Mossu; femme Gourier; née Moussu; femme Moussu, and Le Moussu. Although another, femme Mossu, exists in the records, the account above and the photographs listed here all refer to the same woman. Additionally, her official status of, "mariée séparée de son mari," combined with her later-revealed, "concubinage" status, makes it difficult to know whether *her* preferred, or even legal, status was single, married, widowed, or separated. Although I originally began the database of women's names, keeping track of a woman's "status," it became evident that in many cases, this was not presently possible, even if she was referred to as, "femme" or "living in concubinage."

<sup>176</sup> Her sentence was commuted to "travaux forcés à perpétuité" and she was deported to les îles du Salut.

<sup>177</sup> NWU/v13/1.1134, Liste des barricades qui ont été enlevées par les troupes de l'assemblée nationale. Barricades ranged from well-established, sandbagged versions over seven feet high and often including artillery, to hastily-constructed pavé piles, used more to hopefully slow Versailles troops. Most fell somewhere in between these descriptions.

barricade scene in the VI arrondissement at the Carrefour de la Croix Rouge.<sup>178</sup> The three women, whose bodies he now sketched, “had retreated up the rue de Sèvres [from the XV arrondissement into the VII arrondissement] and had come over the barricade [at the Carrefour de la Croix Rouge] where they were [later] killed (as the baker told us).” He added, “We saw there the last of the *fédérés* defending this place which was later demolished in front of us.” In another drawing AC made during the early morning hours of 23 May, orderly rows of bodies include women as they line the banks of the Seine at Quai d’Orsay, where fighting raged through the next day. (Figure 5.15)<sup>179</sup> Accenting their sex category even in death, AC details the breasts and skirts of female victims in the pen and ink drawings. In the 23 May depiction, of the 20 bodies identifiable in the picture, at least four are clearly those of females; however, those four are among the nine bodies most clearly drawn. The artist-as-voyeur also included himself, seated on a small boat tied to the bank as he records the scene. A woman in National Guard uniform forefronts the drawing as her dead body rests virtually in the river, not aligned with the other bodies in the row. Again, the body of a woman lays perpendicular to the rest in the scene, drawing specific attention. Women amid the military dead provided a focus for the artist, revealing, not only the gendered interest of the *flaneur*, but the presence of communardes in military settings. Another male observer noted the volume of the dead along the quays, as well as women’s place in events.

Descriptions of carnage and women’s accountability for fires became

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<sup>178</sup> AN/AB XIX 3353/22.

<sup>179</sup> NWU/Siege and Commune of Paris/Etchings/pf1 (AC), 71.



consistent themes in commentaries; anti-communarde, Ernest Vizitelly remarked on both. Of 25 May, Vizitelly wrote,

My brother was particularly struck by the large number of dead insurgents whom he saw laying about the quays. At one point the bodies had been collected together and piled in layers one atop of another. In connection with the slaughter, MacMahon subsequently admitted that 15,000 insurgents were shot dead during that Bloody Week, and in General Appert's opinion, the number was even greater.<sup>180</sup>

Though Vizitelly did not mention a count of female bodies, he corroborates AC's descriptions of bodies lined up after shot dead. Vizitelly was not a communard, in his account acting as a "reporter" of scenes he and others claimed to witness. Despite his bias, however, Vizitelly discounted women's dominance as incendiaries, stating that those who had recently determined that "*pétroleuses*" had committed the bulk of arsons were incorrect.<sup>181</sup> Even so, he agreed women took part in all aspects of the fighting, even setting fires. His reportage, while not evenhanded, took into account possible reasons for women's involvement.

Vizitelly gave his summation as to the escalations of women's violent actions. For many, women's violence appeared to have escalated since September; more recently, the increase had become harder to justify. He wrote,

These unfortunate creatures were the outcome of the Franco-German war, of the grim, dark, cold, hungry days of the first siege, of the cruel want, the enforced idleness, the continuous unrest of ten long woeful months. They had suffered more, often far more, than the men had suffered. Even during the Commune they had remained half-starved; they had lost husbands killed in the fighting, children who had wasted away in thousands. Despair, rancor, and hatred had mastered them. . . . Many of them were now sheer furies, but it was war, with all its horrors, its losses, its privations, its bloodthirstiness, which had made them such.<sup>182</sup>

After this set up, he immediately describes the station at Montparnasse, "stoutly

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<sup>180</sup> Vizitelly, *My Adventures in the Commune: Paris 1871*, 337. These are conservative Versailles figures, although higher than Thiers' comment of only a few thousand.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 324-5.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 317.

defended by the insurgents, among whom a woman figured prominently.”<sup>183</sup> Two of the images he used to illustrate his book reveal women in scenes described as, “Soldiers Firing on Insurgents from the Housetops” and “A Barricade at Neuilly.”<sup>184</sup> Although Vizitelly’s partisanship against the Commune shows through in his writing, he did not analyze them as essentialized, unnatural beings. On the contrary, he linked women’s defense of the Commune with their material conditions and experiences, accentuated by the siege. He also gave specific examples of their use of weaponry. Police were quickly overwhelmed by arrests of the “sheer furies,” described by Vizitelly.

Before the end of Bloody Week, police began to complain to superiors of being undermanned in the face of arresting so many women. A 27 May police report described women enjoying the sight of burning buildings. A Captain Dufou stated that he did not “have sufficient men to do the job necessary” [of arresting so many women] even though for the moment, “all [was] quiet.”<sup>185</sup> On that day, police officer Hullet “arrested four women who eagerly shouted with glee seeing the Palace de Justice burn.”<sup>186</sup> Evidently they believed justice lay elsewhere. A 27 May arrest record indicates that police arrested Michel-Marie Garnier, *femme* Huart, a 30-year-

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<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 319. Writing in 1914, Vizitelly concluded his book by noting that France’s “present difficulties” were the result of the Commune era. He also blamed “married people [who have] failed to do their duty.” He is not unique in believing depopulation as a cause for later military weakness. Others frequently exploited the 1871 loss of Alsace and parts of Lorraine as reason for war. However, he is rare in openly linking the violent beginnings of the Third Republic relevant to the Commune, to 1914 problems.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., Frontpiece, 200. These appear to have come from either the *Illustrated London News* or *le Monde Illustré*.

<sup>185</sup> APP/Ba 367-1/pf2.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

old laundress.<sup>187</sup> She justified her claim to the streets by saying she was “searching for her husband.” Police then having found “a container of petrol at her residence,” Garnier Huart further drew their ire because she claimed ignorance as to her husband’s whereabouts.<sup>188</sup> Police were not the only men to suspect women of arson, though the police were often less emotional about the possibility than other authors.

A.J. Dalsème wrote down his observations during the siege and Commune, initially managing to analyze events and women’s participation in generally descriptive tones. Dalsème began a section of his book about the Commune with, “A great number of women carried guns and wore men’s clothing; for the most part, this could be noticed [especially] in the ranks of the *fédérés*.”<sup>189</sup> He adds that at one point he had seen, “a battalion *exclusivement féminin*.”<sup>190</sup> Later he described “groups of combatants lying in wait at dawn, lined up body to body; [later] the fevered inhabitants – men, women, and children – were running everywhere, *pêle-mêle*.”<sup>191</sup> Dalsème’s book was in its third edition during 1871, indicating a sizeable demand for these descriptions. The tone of his prose prior to Bloody Week indicates a fairly unemotional description overall. Things quickly change once women’s ubiquitous presence is established in the narrative.

Dalsème’s tenor alters significantly on the next page, either encouraging or

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid. I have yet to locate an extant trial record or pardon record, so determination of her fate after this day is not yet possible.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid. Search warrants were unnecessary.

<sup>189</sup> BHVP/in-8° 955, A. J. Dalsème, *Paris pendant le siège et les 65 jours de la Commune avec un plan détaillé et des fac-simile* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1871), 398. Dalsème is one of the few to number the days of the Commune according to elections.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 407.

playing to people's gendered, virulent response to communarde visibility during Bloody Week. On the page immediately following his description of "groups of combatants" that included women, Dalsème turns to the "hideous *femelles*," who were "this horrible *type*: les *Pétroleuses*."<sup>192</sup> He dichotomizes all participants with, "*Ils tuent; elles brûlent. Ils assassinent les hommes descendus dans la rue; elles vouent aux flammes les femmes et les enfants restés dans les maisons.*"<sup>193</sup> One communard, Paul Martine, later explained that, "*pétroliers*" were the initial subjects of concern. However, "they only feminized the word in the last days, *par besoin de syntaxe*," indicating a shift in focus.<sup>194</sup> The adaptation of syntax may also expose a change in communarde tactics.

Justifications for using fire included military considerations claimed by communard, Paul Martine. He described many scenes of female barricade defenders and estimates the percentage of women among those killed during Bloody Week and weeks following, at twenty percent.<sup>195</sup> Regarding the fires, Martine admitted that some were set off by the artillery bombardment, but that, "being sincere: most of the fires were the work of our friends."<sup>196</sup> The ungendered, "friends," is here reminiscent of Malenfant Rouchy's usage when referring to her National Guard compatriots. Martine clarified that, "using fire to destroy a house [or] neighborhood,

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<sup>192</sup> This reference to communardes as *femelles* reveals that Dumas' expression, published during the first week of June 1871, hit its target, although it also indicates that his reference to some women as less than human, was not a unique epithet.

<sup>193</sup> BHVP/in-8° 955, A. J. Dalsème, *Paris pendant le siège et les 65 jours de la Commune*, 408.

<sup>194</sup> Martine, *Souvenirs d'un insurgé: La Commune 1871*, 228.

<sup>195</sup> Martine, *Souvenirs d'un insurgé: La Commune 1871*, 283. If true, perhaps approximately 6,000 women met their deaths during this week.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 236-7.

etc . . . is a regular act of war, when it is a question of stopping advances or protecting a retreat. Usually those buildings on corners of streets were on fire – with certain exceptions.”<sup>197</sup> He concluded by indicating his perceptions about the potential uniqueness of this particular event in total war history. “Ever since civilizations have existed, the conquerors have attempted to disarm their adversaries and submit them to the law, but in this case, Thiers dreamed of exterminating his enemies.”<sup>198</sup> Potentially, this analysis exposes women’s ability to assume a status as an individual – as an ungendered “enemy” whose actions as such bring one to the attention of the exterminators. It also suggests that women became specific targets of the annihilation. Or both. What is clear is that being female did not relieve a person from the status of enemy combatant in the eyes of the Republic’s leadership and military personnel in Paris. It often brought them the status of “*pétroleuse*,” a term spontaneously employed for a new type of criminal worthy of death. Martine’s impressionistic estimate of twenty percent for women killed during Bloody Week has a second.

Anecdotal evidence from a 24 May rendering by AC suggests that some locations revealed that a substantial minority of the dead were women. Some may have been difficult to identify as such. AC sketched the dead at the Seine landing at Alma on the border of the VII arrondissement. (Figure 5.16)<sup>199</sup> The artist noted, for eight locations, how many communardes lay dead and how many of them were

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 277.

<sup>199</sup> AN/AB XIX/3353/10.

women.

<u>Location</u>	<u>People Shot</u>	<u>Women</u>	<u>Men</u>
Le quai d'orsay à la descente en face l'abourdormage	47	9	38
à la descente de l'Alma	16	5	11
le Pont des Invalides devant la manufacture des tabacs	8	2	6
devant l'Esplanade des Invalides	12	1	11
au Pont de la Concorde - devant moi, descente au face la...	2	illeg.	illeg.
Cour du Télégraphe...	400	0	400
Place de la Concorde ...	2	2	0
En face le Conseil d'Etat et la Legion d'honneur	60	10	50
	547	29	516

Of the six locations most carefully described, the bodies of 29 women and 116 men appear in the record, indicating his perception that one-fourth of the dead were women. In the original, the Cour du Télégraph location appears to represent a number of different tallies from a larger area, listing “400 shot.” Given the even number, the author may have saw the site, but estimated or took another’s word for it. The author tallied all 400 victims as men. However, the circumstances of the observation and his lack of specifics here, otherwise attached to most of his sketches, suggest that the 400 may or may not be as precisely accurate as to the sex and number of victims. The same week, William Fetridge remarked, “One of the most furious defenders of this barricade (Rue Brezin [in the XIV arrondissement]) was a woman dressed in the uniform of a National Guard. She was killed during the action, and in clearing away the bodies her sex was discovered.”<sup>200</sup> Evidently one’s sex was not always clear until after death, offering a nod to Dumas’ analysis. In both cases, observers indicated significant interest in the sex of their subjects. Their interest indicates, not only women’s presence in a variety of revolutionary circumstances, but that men took notice of them. Additionally, even if only *some* military engagements

<sup>200</sup> Fetridge, *The Rise and Fall of the Paris Commune in 1871*, 328.

or summary executions resulted in twenty percent of the total dead being women, this remains a high figure. If they survived Bloody Week, women combatants' attire, location, and military actions sometimes linked them to arson, despite their refutations.

Responsibility for orchestrating the holocaust of burning buildings that came to represent the Commune and its aftermath came to rest on those women tried for arson. Anne Marie Ménard found herself originally sentenced to death for "having brought massacre, devastation, and pillage to the city and suburbs of Paris," as well as setting fires and carrying weapons.<sup>201</sup> The massacres, evidently, were now her fault. Ménard, however, attempted to associate herself more closely with ambulance service, not with barricade construction, guns, and fiery holocaust. Although claiming to be in her residence on 21 May, on 22 May, she admitted having seen "wounded transported from [a nearby location and] she went to help, continuing to do so until 23 May."<sup>202</sup> However, she came under arrest on the last day of the fighting, 28 May, "for having participated in the fire of the houses on the rue Royale . . . [as] many witnesses knew her and had heard her instructions in the events."<sup>203</sup> One charged leveled against her was that she had "chosen the places that were to be set ablaze," as well as the means to carry out the job.<sup>204</sup> According to those now testifying against her, she not only led this military maneuver; Ménard's acts included warnings to residents.

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<sup>201</sup> AN/ BB24/744, Rapport of 4 July 1872.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid. Meaning, they believed her to have taken part in the fires earlier in the week, not on 28 May.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

Communardes such as Ménard appear as almost invisible footnotes to the history of the Commune, but some held prominent reputations during events, which brought them to the attention of more than a few witnesses. Ménard had evidently insulted and threatened with arrest a woman named Mme Poulin during the Commune. Poulin later testified that she had contact with Ménard when the latter had “wanted to take a child of 14 to work on the barricades.”<sup>205</sup> According to another witness, Mlle Derigaut, “the day the fires were set on rue Royale, she saw Marie Menand (sic) with a *fédéré*, in the apartment of Monsieur Dablin (at rue Royale 17).” Mlle Derigaut claimed that she “left the house because they were going to set it on fire,” noting that Ménard had not been quiet as to her intent. According to a third witness, “when she left her room an hour later, the loge of the concière was in flames and no one other than Marie Menand (sic) and the *fédéré* who accompanied her had entered the house.” Ménard’s public expressions, Commune ambulance service, carrying of arms, barricade association, and overall visibility had gained the attention of many, now willing to testify against her. Calls to chase out those deemed undeserving of communarde compassion had been consistent in Commune clubs and streets. However, during Bloody Week, announcements such as Ménard’s preceded the fires, likely saving lives.

In Ménard’s case, a witness testified that Ménard rounded up residents near the border of the I and VIII arrondissements, whose abodes were to be torched. Mlle Fédas, said that on the night of 22-23 May, “this woman [Ménard] came to the hotel

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<sup>205</sup> Ibid.



run by Mme Delattre at rue St-Honoré 414 [running parallel to rue de Rivoli and crossing rue Royale, where Ménard was accused of setting fires], in order to announce to people who were found there that the house was going to be burned.”<sup>206</sup> According to this same witness, Ménard then “escorted them all to the *chapelier* of rue St-Florentin, where they found themselves reunited with several other refugees of the neighborhood.” Another woman, *Veuve* Duriot testified similarly. She stated that she was escorted there after a knock upon her door, after which she was told the house was to be burned. A married couple, Monsieur and Madame Ladurée found themselves in the same company after similar contact with Ménard. Ultimately, Ménard attempted to requisition “bourgeois clothing” from a resident, arguing that, “There are no longer rich people today! Everything is ours!” When a concierge refused to cooperate, Ménard reportedly “threatened to kill him and shot a pistol she had hidden under her clothes.” Two women unsuccessfully attempted to disarm her. She eventually got her desired clothing from a different location, although increasing the number of people willing to testify against her as she went. Still, in her attempt to destroy the property of the rich – or abscond with it in the case of clothing – she guided residents to safety, even if her language and approach were uncouth, and her goals distained. Other women never experienced arrest or heard from witnesses.

Goncourt observed women’s bodies during Bloody Week, as he had during the previous months, revealing similarities with police archival records, as well as the diversity of arrestees. On 23 May he wrote of “one dramatic detail which [he] forgot”

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

to relate previously.<sup>207</sup> “In a recess in front of a closed *porte-cochère*, a [dead] woman lies flat along the sidewalk, holding a *képi* in one of her hands.”<sup>208</sup> Goncourt needed to identify her as *communarde*, rather than “innocent” and did so by associating her with the *képi*, whatever the particulars of its location at that moment. He saved the bulk of his Bloody Week descriptions about women, however, for those still alive. By 26 May, the streets of Paris and the highways and stations heading towards Versailles filled with prisoners. Goncourt’s comments reveal women’s presence among them, but also the fact authorities kept careful count of them by their sex category, as their own files also indicate. He wrote, “Prisoners are waiting to set out for Versailles. There are a lot of them, for I hear an officer say in a low voice as he gives a paper to the colonel, ‘407, of whom 66 are women’” – indicating over sixteen percent of prisoners in this group as female. Goncourt added, “it is a crowd from every social level, workmen with hard faces, artisans in loose-fitting jackets, bourgeois with socialist hats, National Guards who have not had time to change their trousers, two infantrymen pale as corpses.”<sup>209</sup> His assessment of the diversity of arrestees mirrors William Fetridge’s description during the Commune: “a crowd of citizens of all classes . . . who belonged to every nationality and rank of life . . . there were shopkeepers and their wives . . . gentlemen whose National Guard trousers were rendered respectable by the gray jacket or blouse of a citizen; humdrum housewives who approved of everything . . . there were flaunted ladies in bonnets of the latest

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<sup>207</sup> Becker, *From the Goncourt Journal*, 299.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 306.

fashion and marvelous petticoats . . . Every class of Parisian society was represented in the throng.”<sup>210</sup> Indicating a less-than-scientific assessment of guilt, Juliette Lamber Adam’s aged father reported to her that he “saw people shot who were totally innocent,” among them, a “most peaceful man of the neighborhood.”<sup>211</sup> Women, however, could still find themselves described by Goncourt in distinctly gendered terms.

Amidst the lines of women prisoners, military attire continued to stand out. Separating the women from the “crowd from every social level,” Goncourt wrote, “Among the women there is the same variety. Some women in silk dresses are next to a woman with a kerchief on her head. You see middle-class women, workingwomen, streetwalkers, one of whom wears a National Guard uniform.”<sup>212</sup> How he determined that the uniformed National Guard was a streetwalker is not clear and may be incorrect. Women’s uniformed presence – visible in prison photographs too – did not end during Bloody Week. Goncourt’s partisan account nonetheless reflects women’s presence in ways also indicated by Mmes Hardouin, Souville Blanchecotte, and Malenfant Rouchy, as well as police and military officers. Rounding up prisoners in this fashion inevitably resulted in incorrect assessments of guilt, but mass arrests – and executions – were part of the military offense.

Taking great numbers of prisoners, as well as the questionable means of gaining them, was part of an overall plan by the Republic’s military leaders. During

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<sup>210</sup> Fetridge, *The Rise and Fall of the Paris Commune in 1871*, 224.

<sup>211</sup> Juliette Adam, *Mes angoisses et nos luttes*, 137.

<sup>212</sup> Becker, *From the Goncourt Journal*, 306. Sources whose authors range from communardes Louise Michel and Lissagaray to rabidly anti-communard Goncourt and duCamp all agree on the socio-economic mix among those rounded up.

the final week, authorities broadly displayed this tactic. One woman, Mme Moulton, writing to her mother on 23 May, noted that, “MacMahon has stormed the barricades and has entered Paris, taking 50,000 prisoners. Gallifet has ordered thousands to be shot.”<sup>213</sup> Malvina Souville Blanchecotte, who had witnessed the 1848 June Days, lamented, “June was a game in comparison to this; this is the extermination of the world.”<sup>214</sup> The Municipal Councils of Paris paid for 17,000 burials, creating the minimum amount of deaths possible; mass graves dug in haste received the remains of more.<sup>215</sup> Souville Blanchecotte described ambulance cars, even the omnibus, “covered in blood,” constantly transporting the dead and wounded.<sup>216</sup> Barricade fighting contributed substantially to the death toll, as well as to women’s visibility.

While some barricades housed cannon or *mitrailleuses*, most were smaller affairs, guarded by citizen-“soldiers” of the neighborhood and built with essentially, *corvée* labor. Souville Blanchecotte saw barricades built “*en famille*” under her window, even as the Commune drew to its close. Describing the daily scene, she wrote, “the children of the neighborhood, among their fathers and mothers, built it while singing,” with “serious men among them.” “The old men, those who can not

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<sup>213</sup> Cited in Joanna Richardson, ed. and trans., *Paris Under Siege: A Journal of Events*, 194. Marie Edme Patrice MacMahon, duc de Magenta (1808-1893) led the Versailles troops in their attack on Paris. He became France’s Chief of State from 1873-1875 and a controversial President of the Third Republic from 1875-1879. Prior to the Franco-Prussian War, MacMahon served as Governor General of Algeria from 1864-1870.

<sup>214</sup> Blanchecotte, *Tablettes*, 189. According to Gullickson, *Unruly Women of Paris*, 1, the death toll during June Days was somewhere between 1,500-3,000 women and men and 4,000 deportations. The Commune government requested the return of those deported after 1848 events, though time, among other things, disallowed the desired result.

<sup>215</sup> Rougerie, “Composition d’une population insurgée,” 32. Even if low numbers for the death toll of over 17,000 had been accurate for the Commune’s suppression, they grossly exceeded 1848 numbers, as well as Thiers’s public estimates.

<sup>216</sup> Blanchecotte, *Tablettes*, 192.

fight like the young, were the night watch on the barricades.” Writing on 24 May with Bloody Week well underway, she related, “our guardian this night was an old man . . . of about 70 years old; his gun trembled in his hands, and his body shook on his legs. An old woman came this morning to bring him soup.”<sup>217</sup> Her use of “our” seems to imply geographical proximity alone, though Blanchcotte was not entirely unsympathetic. Another old *fédéré* “didn’t stop repeating, ‘My poor wife! My poor children! If we could die together! What a curse to be poor!’”<sup>218</sup> These citizen-occupied barricades were often not the stuff of enduring military defenses, but reveal the prevalence of women’s visibility in their making and defense. *Corvée* labor from all citizens of all sexes and ages served as another form of requisitioning in this case. It also served the Commune’s defenses and kept many people indoors, if possible. Although sympathetic to the poor, Souville Blanchecotte wrote that she felt imprisoned and that, “They will never make me put one *pavé* on a barricade, they would kill me before they will force me.”<sup>219</sup> Communarde Eliska Vincent also noted the *corvée* labor necessitated from all passers-by saying, “Those passing by were required to stop and add a *pavé* on the barricade that was in their path.”<sup>220</sup> Souville Blanchecotte was not a barricade fighter, but her observations from her home reveal the centrality of women’s labor on the barricades and that she understood her presence outside would require her to participate at the barricade. Her commentary

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 195.

<sup>220</sup> BMD/ms168/d’Eliska Vincent, 11.

also exposes the meaningful – if at times, personal – supporting roles women played more generally. This military effort continued during the fighting.

Professional soldiers or not, women fully participated during final assaults. Although she did not help, Souville Blanchecotte was an overhead observer to barricade tactics and their demise once Versailles troops engaged the barricade, virtually at her front door. “Women prepared the guns, the men fired; the cannon and *mitrailleuse* raged.”<sup>221</sup> The barricade could not hold and balls whistled through her windows at times. The battle ultimately lasted over seven hours, until about 8:00 that evening, with women present for the duration.<sup>222</sup> The resultant scene was one of blood and of “the dead, everywhere the dead.”<sup>223</sup> As Robert Tombs argues, despite less military experience and organization among its citizen-soldiers than Versailles’ regular troops, Commune barricades did not tend to fall easily, demonstrating hardened resistance.<sup>224</sup> This resistance often agitated *Versillais* forces. The following day, Souville Blanchecotte writes of summary executions and bodies next to her front door. Although not mentioning dead women barricade fighters in particular, she wrote, “Women of the neighborhood – already all in black – came to find their men; they looked for their husbands or their fathers in each pile.” She concluded this portion of her description by saying, “Today, the omnibus runs; they run a lot, not for the living, [but] for the dead.”<sup>225</sup> Although the majority of combatants were men, women formed a prominent, and evidently not exceptional,

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<sup>221</sup> Blanchecotte, *Tablettes*, 204

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 206.

<sup>224</sup> Tombs, *The War Against Paris 1871*, especially Chapter 9, “The Battle of Paris.”

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 213.

component of people around barricades both during and after the fighting.

Joséphine Mimet Bernard eventually found herself accused of directing Bloody Week defenses around barricades. She had lived in the XII arrondissement, but by 24 May during the Commune's retreat, she occupied a barricade on rue St Antoine in the IV arrondissement.<sup>226</sup> She received five years of imprisonment and another five years of surveillance for "making barricades in an insurgent movement with extenuating circumstances."<sup>227</sup> As Mimet Bernard did not deny having attended a barricade, the "extenuating circumstances" convinced military judicial authorities of her added guilt, deserving of a longer sentence. Witnesses attested that on 24 May, Mimet Bernard, "with a gun in her hand at rue St Antoine, [was seen] assigning insurgents to windows on the rooftops," with *fédérés* following her orders. Mimet Bernard had prior convictions for adultery and public indecency and had partnered *en concubinage* with a carpenter for the past nine years. The court appears to have understood that those points, when combined with verbal threats against *fédérés* and wives of police, marked her for a gender inverted role of ordering troops to their positions. As for Mimet Bernard, she denied having ordered soldiers to particular windows. However, her trial record suggests she thought defending the barricade from above, as well as from below, "was a good idea," though she claimed not to have carried out the plan herself.<sup>228</sup> Another woman was imagined as "inflaming civil war."

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<sup>226</sup> AN/BB24/746. AHG/Ly23/26<sup>e</sup> Conseil de Guerre, Bernard (Joséphine), née Mimet. See here, Chapter III, 207 for her verbal assault on a police wife.

<sup>227</sup> AN/BB24/746, 19 Juin 1872 Rapport.

<sup>228</sup> AHG/Ly23/26<sup>e</sup> Conseil de Guerre, Bernard (Joséphine) née Mimet.

Elodie Duvert, *Veuve Richaux* lived in the VII arrondissement and appears to have consistently encouraged the Commune's defense through her words, arms-association, and payments. Duvert Richaux had a bit of disposable income. She generally "was accompanied by *la fille* Durand, her maid servant, who lived with her in her "ordinary house of ill-repute" or "simple inn" – depending on whether the police or Duvert Richaux were the most accurate.<sup>229</sup> She admitted to "filling sandbags," and according to two witnesses she had "paid some *gamins* to break up *pavés* for barricades," disclosing another route of wartime funding. Her conviction was for "inflaming civil war by calling *citoyens* to arms" and "carrying arms in an insurrectional movement." The wording illuminates that the discourse of military tribunals acknowledged a woman's ability to incite and spread civil war. Additionally, her admission of "violent words," and "barricade construction" led Duvert Richaux to ten years of detention. However, by 1877, she had been released from the balance of her sentence due to debilitating health. She had gained promises of financial and care-giving support from respected family members, such as her brother, a civil engineer. Her brother refers to her as a "political convict" in two succeeding requests for her pardon in mid-1875, perhaps hinting his understanding of the Commune, or simply using the term military and prison officials applied to Commune-related convicts of all stripes.<sup>230</sup> As barricades fell during the Commune's final week, another wave of people followed the path of destruction.

In the closing pages of her memoir, Souville Blanchecotte depicts the "scene

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<sup>229</sup> AN/BB24/753.

<sup>230</sup> AN/BB24/753, undated "Letter from M. Duvert in behalf of his sister to the President."



of horror” out her doorway, including the rag pickers pilfering from the dead.<sup>231</sup> She describes vehicles and their attendants picking up bodies, “blood up to their shoulders,” and the rag pickers coming next.<sup>232</sup> An ambulance surgeon had once described a battlefield to her, leaving Souville Blanchecotte to say that now, the rag pickers “follow, picking up whatever is left, fallen papers, letters, debris, bits of ribbon and clothing . . . like after a [battlefield] battle.”<sup>233</sup> Rag pickers most often included women and given the likely appearance of these poorest-of-the-poor, some may have been shot by those on the lookout for women who “looked like” *pétroleuses*. Women became part of the battlefield, even if they had not always been part of the battle. Rifle shots and artillery fire continued throughout the night, with calls of the firing squads within earshot of Souville Blanchecotte.<sup>234</sup> The next day, 26 May, she saw the results.

Malvina Souville Blanchecotte described a wide array of scenes including women as the final days of the Commune expired. “A convoy of insurgents – about 40 men and women – defiled, chained, heads down, in the middle of soldiers who conduct them to firing squads,” met her view.<sup>235</sup> She did not indicate what she meant by “defiled.” By 28 May, Blanchecotte noted soldiers following a “*femme fédérée*,” ultimately losing track of her.<sup>236</sup> At 2:00pm she observed a convoy of “6,000 prisoners, coming from Belleville,” though does not indicate how she evaluates the

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<sup>231</sup> Blanchecotte, *Tablettes*, 213.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 213-214.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 216.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 223.

number.<sup>237</sup> By 5 June, she described the warehousing at Roquette prison, noting that “thousands of prisoners go through there; women are there, savagely untiring.”<sup>238</sup> Although not defending communardes, she brought women to the forefront in her descriptions, revealing their ubiquitous presence in urban warfare, just ended. For some women, the war was not over.

Apparently, police forced denunciations of individuals in the coming days and weeks, often with gendered tactics. Paul Martine argued that often, “concierges were forced – with guns to their heads – to denounce partisans of the Commune – or even anyone considered a ‘republican.’”<sup>239</sup> *Versillais* troops and allied police, “terrorized women, domestics, the well-to-do, in order to force them to talk. Many gave random names they could think of. Many were then seized and shot on their own doorsteps, despite the tears of their [families].”<sup>240</sup> Adding to the terrorist tactics, “the wounded were shot in their beds. In many cases the bodies were defiled.” In describing events at Place Vendôme, Martine wrote, “they would rape the dying women,” with their leaders “applauding these horrors.”<sup>241</sup> Somewhat understanding the gendered nature

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 226.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 238.

<sup>239</sup> Martine, *Souvenirs d'un Insurgé*, 278. Concierges were often fonts of information, but this statement and the regularity of their testimony in arrest and trial records, suggests that police used them, sometimes in a less than voluntary manner. Further research is needed, but this police tactic, among others, implies torture – also underrepresented in accounts, given the level of violence. Hardouin's memoir, however discusses its use in women's prisons in the Commune's aftermath.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 278-9.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 279. Gullickson, *Unruly Women*, 180-81. Gullickson concludes that many of Blanchecotte's “savagely untiring” women evidently did not respond to military intimidation, as did men, leaving them further vulnerable to gendered humiliation and violence. Many whom were marched through the streets “had their chests exposed to show their sex.” Gullickson significantly notes that for men, the humiliation of capture may have been enough to cow them, while for women – already powerless in many ways – capture alone would not suffice. Stripping, raping, and killing a woman – though not necessarily in that order – commonly occurring during Bloody Week, as Gullickson discusses, using published sources such as Martine's. This was part of the *de rigueur* of this military endeavor.

of the oppression, Martine explains, “It was on the women that the *porteurs d’épaulettes* released their ferociousness.”<sup>242</sup> This was especially the case after arrests, if they did not lead to summary executions.

Martine depicts women as police and military targets, even if their “crime” was being the wife of an insurgent; a woman’s status as a mother did not save her. In one case, “not exceptional,” according to the witness, “a man who was going to be shot by *Versillais* troops, asked to hold his wife and children once more and the captain let him.”<sup>243</sup> Then, the captain gave the order, “‘Shoot them all!’ They shot the husband, the wife and the children.”<sup>244</sup> Martine explains that a “considerable number” of women were killed, “thirty of them executed at one time on the place Vendôme,” with “several hundred in the XIII arrondissement, the *quartier bas* of the V<sup>e</sup>, and at least that many in the XVIII<sup>e</sup>, Montmartre.”<sup>245</sup> However, “the most massacres of women took place at the Luxembourg, the caserne Lobau, at the Bastille, and the Jardin des Plantes. All the streets of Paris were covered with *cadavres féminins*.” Before mentioning his figure of twenty percent of those killed being women, he mentions that, “I am not [even] speaking of those killed while in the course of traveling to Versailles.”<sup>246</sup> Troops viewed women – even their children – as relevant, even preferred, targets. The women of the Malenfant Rouchy household

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Although Hardouin also implies rape as a tool of the Republic’s troops and prison officials, 1871-era sources are generally less direct in their use of the term, especially among women themselves. However, given the level of violence, it is noticeable in its absence.

<sup>242</sup> Martine, *Souvenirs d’un Insurgé*, 281. Some communard writers attempted to refute the reactionary idea that women were especially hellacious in their armed defense of the Commune, though few evince Martine’s more careful understanding of Versailles’ gendered military tactics.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 282.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, 283.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*

avoided arrest and death, but were nonetheless targets, as the Commune's new order was extinguished.

The story told of Bloody Week to Malenfant Rouchy by her mother reveals a poignant exposition of the prevalence of "women only when dead" on the streets of Paris. Malenfant Rouchy found out on 25 May that a condemnation of death had been laid upon her. She then had the added concern of finding her mother to let her know that she was, indeed, alive.<sup>247</sup> Not only did the *Versillais* ultimately believe her dead – likely indicating someone else had been killed in her place – her mother believed her dead too.<sup>248</sup> When they were finally reunited toward the end of Bloody Week, her mother, 63, told of having searched the many bodies, looking for signs that her daughter was among them. Her mother recited, "I looked everywhere in Paris; I looked among all the bodies! On the Avenue Victoria, among a great number of those shot dead, I saw a small woman, clothed as you were, her face unrecognizable. She had a wedding ring on her finger, just like yours. I held her for long time."<sup>249</sup> Her narrative continues, "I was almost happy to know you were dead, because if you had been taken as a prisoner, you would have suffered so much. Convinced it was you, I resigned myself to your death."<sup>250</sup> This account, likely not unique in the experience it depicts, indicates the tenuous positions in which a variety of women found themselves as the Commune ended. Malenfant reveals the fear many women

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<sup>247</sup> Brocher, *Souvenirs*, 217.

<sup>248</sup> According to a "*Remarque*" included in her memoir, Malenfant Rouchy's *casier judiciaire* from 1874 indicates the government considered "Victorine Rouchy, née Malenfant," dead. Brocher, *Souvenirs d'une morte vivante*, 11.

<sup>249</sup> Ibid., 226.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid. Obtuse statements like this are often as close as women get to possible references to rape and other tortures, in addition to the deprivations of prison.

rightfully felt about prison conditions for women. Her tale also points out that many women's bodies covered the streets of Paris, as anonymous as most were. The Malenfans' experience also serves as a corrective to Malvina Souville Blanchecotte's contention that women covered the streets during Bloody Week looking "for their husbands and sons." Some women searched for mothers or daughters, some of whom they knew had taken part in the fighting.

This chapter argued that between 18 March – 28 May, 1871, women of the popular classes infiltrated Commune military organization. Their presence integrated gender into the most obvious component of revolution: armed combat. The military roles played by so many working women at times revealed disagreements with gendered limits placed on their revolutionary involvement and highlighted their fate during Bloody Week. Women served in front-line and supply-line military capacities and included women like the wife of a communard general known as *La Générale Eudes* and *La Colonelle Vrecq Bedier*.<sup>251</sup> They served as *cantinières*, *ambulancières*, artillery gunners, ammunition suppliers, and armed barricade defenders. Some followed the time-honored military tradition of setting fires to halt their enemies – or anger them. They frequently redefined military positions as they served in them. Women regularly defied male expectations, even demands.

Ignoring the suffrage that came with male, armed duty, women argued around male-based definitions of armed service. In so doing, they demonstrated the flaws of

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<sup>251</sup> For Eudes, NWU/Siege and Commune of Paris/Victorine Loubet (Louvet) Eudes, "La générale Eudes" available from <http://www.library.northwestern.edu/spec/siege/docs/PAR01074.html> ; Internet; accessed on 17 July 2005.

sex-based military service overall, but especially given the Commune's goals – and defensive military position. Often, women's attire reflected their occupation of military posts, while they – paraphrasing Louise Michel – simply took their places without begging for them. However, they were not content with “just the appearance” of equality. Access to the equal pay and rations of National Guard personnel made women a part of the leagues of “*trente sous*,” which came to represent the military of the siege and Commune. Whether or not Cluseret, Dombrowski, or doctors in ambulances gave permission, women occupied military roles during the new order of the Commune. As André Léo had argued on the front page of *La Sociale*, the Commune meant, *Toutes avec Tous*.

This study also analyzed the violence during 21-28 May 1871. It argued that women became targets of police and military personnel in gendered ways as barricades fell from the southwest, through the city's center, and eventually to the workers' arrondissements in the northeast of the city. Collectively, a range of sources argue that women's visibility as living and dead members of the Commune's defense, followed the geographical trajectory of its retreat, even though women lived in other arrondissements. That is, women accompanied military engagement throughout. Although women participated during the Franco-Prussian War and the accompanying siege, their armed participation escalated over the course of the Commune, especially with the final week. Some women carried side arms as part of their public persona, while others fought behind barricades in a range of capacities. Versailles-backed police, as well as the military personnel and judicial system working for the Republic,

justified women's arrests and sentences of prison terms, hard labor, deportation to colonial penal colonies, and life-long surveillance. Others ended their lives in the streets of Paris – behind barricades, in doorways, or raped in the shadows of monuments – after which their identifiable or unidentifiable bodies were buried.

Robert Tombs' argument that, "few women were ever identified" due to women being "marginal to the National Guard structure; their very presence may have been incidental, a consequence of their ubiquity in the streets," too-easily dismisses that presence – or ignores the rest of the story. Using incomplete sets of sentencing records produces a limited view of women's participation overall, neglecting other records in which women's actions become visible, even when anonymous. Women within the battalions of the National Guard such as Malenfant Rouchy and hero, Gaïnder, *épouse* Lachaise were not marginal among their friends in their units, although not numerically dominant. Malenfant Rouchy's account makes public the complexities of communarde military service. I also exposes one example of why a particular, if obvious, set of records can leave lacunae when assessing women's military participation. Women's military experiences forced practical, if not always declared, changes in the new – if ultimately temporary – order promoted by the Commune, just as their verbal occupation of space and their pressure tactics on Commune leadership also altered its course.



**FIGURE 5.1, Marguerite Gunder Prévost, *épouse* Lachaise.**  
Northwestern University Charles Deering Special Collections Library



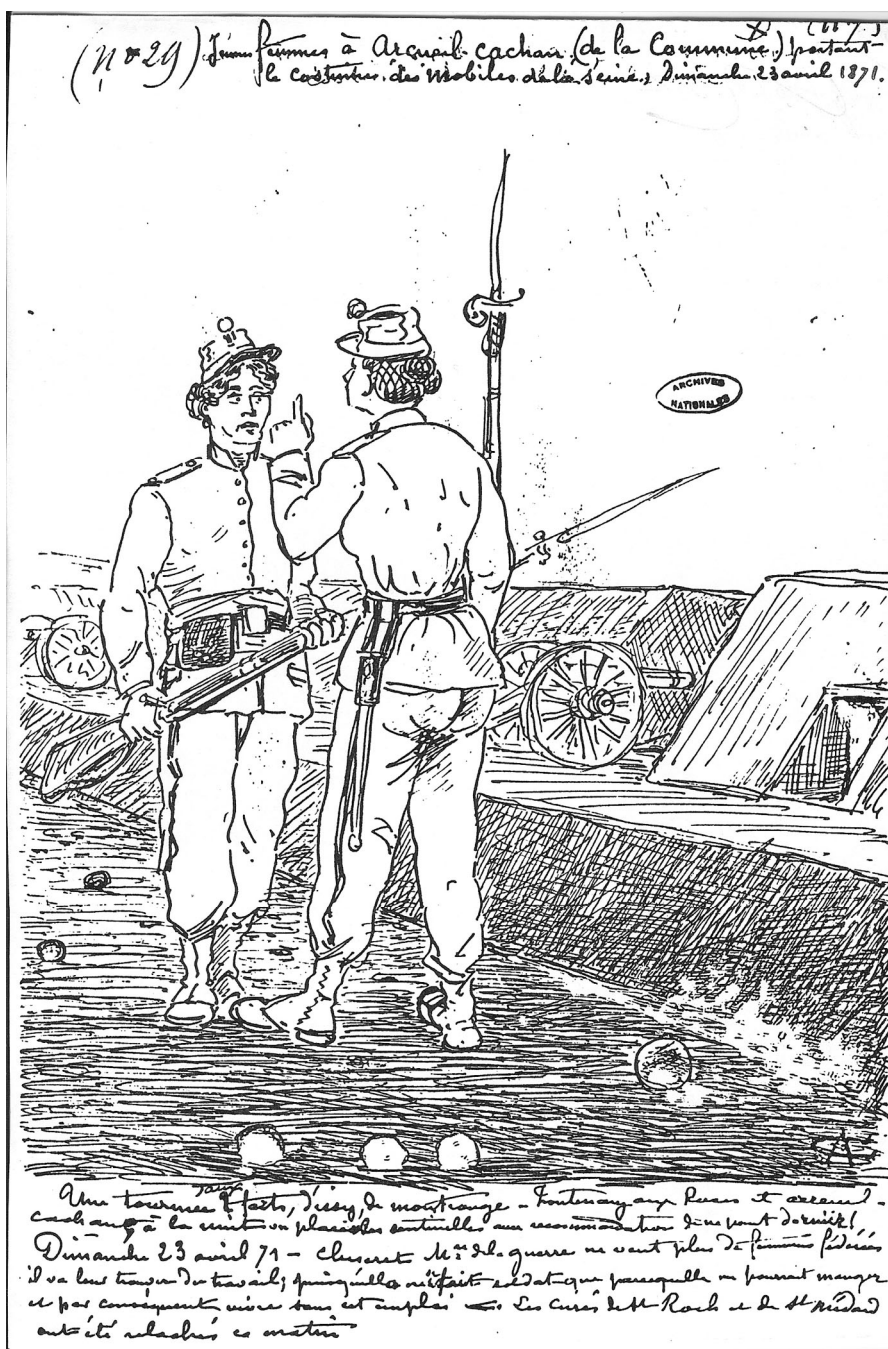


FIGURE 5.2, AC, 23 Avril 1871: Jeunes femmes portant le costumes  
des Mobiles de la Seine.  
Archives Nationales, Paris

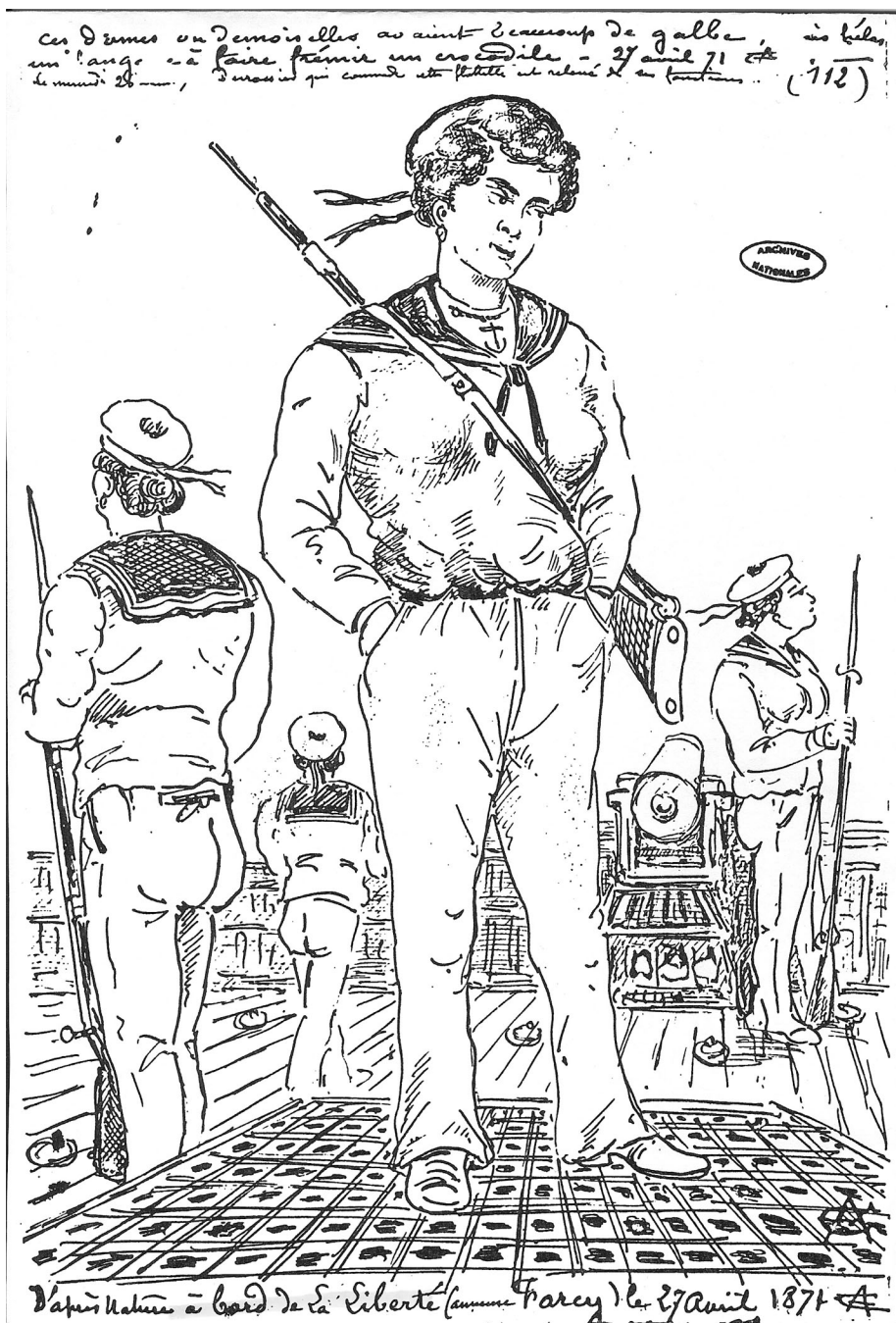


FIGURE 5.3, AC, 27 Avril 1871: À bord de *La Liberté*.  
 Archives Nationales, Paris



FIGURE 5.4, AC, 10 Mai 1871: Elles chantant la Marseillaise.  
 Archives Nationales, Paris



FIGURE 5.5, AC, 11 Mai 1871: Les Amazones.  
Archives Nationales, Paris



FIGURE 5.6, AC, 19 Mai 1871: Mitrailleuse blindée servie par les femmes.

Archives Nationales, Paris





La porte Maillot gardée  
 par des femmes en costumes mitigés - Les unes en marin, d'autres  
 d'autres, avec Képis - jupons courts - ceinture rouge etc j'en ai compté  
 34/ (Erente et une -) Le vendredi 19 mai 1871 - on s'amusait elles m'ont  
 dit qu'une partie d'elles allaient aller travailler aux fosses! qu'importe?

FIGURE 5.7, AC, 27 Avril 1871: La porte Maillot gardée par les femmes.  
 Archives Nationales, Paris



**FIGURE 5.8, Clara Fournier, *pointeuse*.**  
Northwestern University Charles Deering McCormick  
Special Collections Library

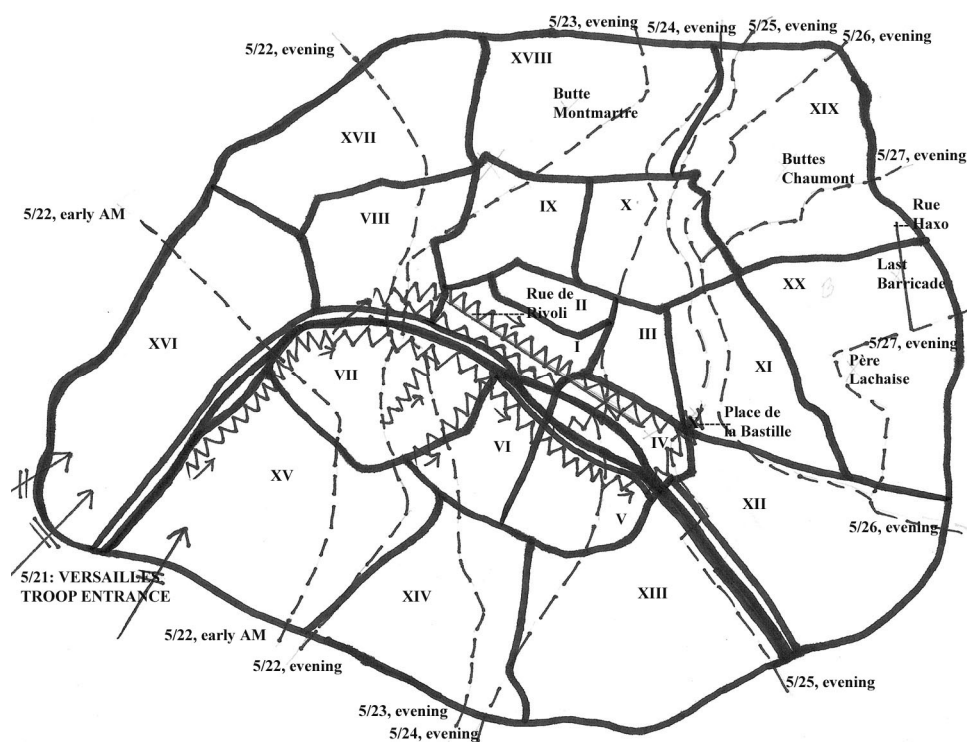


**FIGURE 5.9, Marie Guyord, *femme* Wolff.**  
Northwestern University Charles Deering McCormick  
Special Collections Library





**FIGURE 5.10, Louise Bonenfant.**  
Northwestern University Charles Deering McCormick  
Special Collections Library



**FIGURE 5.11, Map of Troop Movements and Paths of Fires.**

~~~~~ - Path of fires, moving west to east from XV arrondissement to Place de la Bastille.

----- - Daily Versailles troop advancements.

Versaillais troop advancement adapted from Robert Tombs, *The War Against Paris 1871*, p147.



FIGURE 5.12, AC, Vers le 23 et 24 Mai 1871: Rue de Lille et du Bac.  
 Archives Nationales, Paris

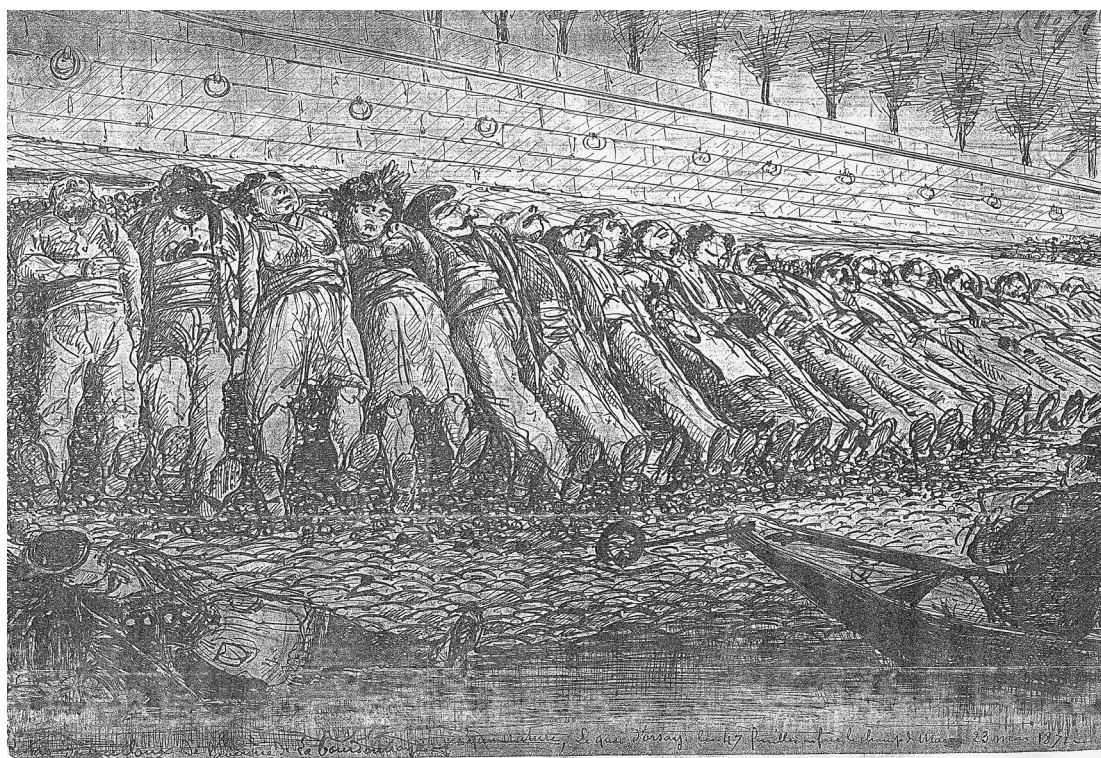


FIGURE 5.13, AC, 23 Mai 1871: Deux femmes qui venaient de brûler la  
rue de Lille.  
Archives Nationales, Paris



**FIGURE 5.14, AC, 25 Mai 1871: Cinq enfants ont été arrêtés et fusillés.**  
 Northwestern University Charles Deering McCormick Special Collections Library





**FIGURE 5.15, AC, 23 Mai 1871: Le quai d'Orsay, les 47 fusillés.**  
Northwestern University Charles Deering McCormick Special Collections Library



FIGURE 5.16, AC, 24 Mai 1871: Descente de l'Alma, 16 fusillés, 5 femmes.  
Northwestern University Charles Deering McCormick Special Collections Library

# CONCLUSION: “WE ONLY HAD TWO MONTHS OF HISTORY”

On the obverse of a 1908 photograph of herself, 70-year-old Victorine Malenfant Rouchy, now Brocher, inscribed, “Souvenir of a revolutionary offered to citizen Lucien Descaves.”<sup>1</sup> Her self-description reveals her life-long personal association with the term revolutionary and her participation in the 1871 Paris Commune. Malenfant Rouchy, among only a handful of women who published memoirs about their Commune experiences, wrote specifically to refute the biases of men like Alexandre Dumas,  *fils*. Whether or not Dumas saw her as a woman or a female, by her own account, she was a *communarde* and a revolutionary. Perhaps the fact she was alive, but declared dead, resists Dumas’s misogyny in unexpected ways. Malenfant Rouchy’s rhetorical abilities and personal agency brought her onto the stage of a new republic and earned her a *poste du combat* in both the siege and Commune. She also supported her mother, two children, at times a husband, re-creating family as needed. With the advent of Bloody Week, her “*morte vivante*” defied Versailles troops, judicial inquiry, and police observation, rendering her temporarily invisible of her own choosing. Had she not written her memoir – resurrecting her words, political perspective, and military participation – she might have remained unnoticed within the archival and published record of the Commune, contributing to historians’ continued reliance on sentencing records.

Edith Thomas was the first to sustain a historical investigation into *communarde* activities, with her salient questions still resonating. She asked, “Who

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<sup>1</sup> IISH/Descaves/BG A2/863. Descaves is primarily responsible for gathering archival fonds relevant to women in the Commune at the IISH and, to a lesser extent, the BMD.



were these women? What did they do? What did they want? What did they think? Were the “*pétroleuses*” a myth or a reality?” answering that, “All of these questions demand the historian’s attention.”<sup>2</sup> Finally, since the 1990s, better answers emerge as historians of women remove the constraints of masculinist traditions in the study of political, military, and social history. This dissertation contributes to the discussion of those questions posed by Thomas – and later, Kathleen Jones and Françoise Vergès.

Gender provided the central stake for this study of the Commune’s development, maintenance, and demise – not only to see women’s presence more clearly, but also to bring greater clarity to the Commune’s revolution. Women made the Commune in ways that reveal nascent assertions of a women-centered polity as part of their revolution. They did so through speech, political pressure tactics, and assuming military roles. Revolution, therefore, can mean something very different when women’s contributions are at the forefront. During the Commune, many women understood their class position in terms of their sex. They understood that a revolution to overturn socio-economic classes or one based in liberal rhetoric about suffrage was not enough unless the subjugated class status of women was acknowledged and leveled. Accordingly, ordinary working women noticed, and acted against, their subjugation to men and male institutions; this was part of the political, social, and cultural revolution they made, if only for a few weeks.

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas, “*Les Pétroleuses*” (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), xiii.

Demonstrated in this work, women initiated the Commune on 18 March 1871, influenced its day-to-day development, and armed in its defense during the final week of May 1871. In so doing, they evinced their agency, arguing that this was their revolution too. Moreover, they did so outside of suffragist programs for equality. Women's words, political actions, and military experiences proved their agency, which was often motivated by material needs. In turn, interests of gender and class, as well as personal and family agendas, affected a woman's agency. However, communardes did not only follow the agendas of communards. The actions of women during both the siege and Commune demonstrate similar priorities across both events, including employment, and ultimately, gendered strategies for survival. Artisans, day laborers, teachers, sex workers, and "*La Blanchisseuse*" contributed to communard ranks. Others – perhaps not rightly "communardes" – occasionally occupied propertied classes and lent their support to events. More than a few of these sympathized with working women's conditions.

During the siege and Commune, many women understood their socio-economic status as further hindered by gendered traditions. Months before the Commune, women vocally asserted themselves in clubs, found work for women, saw declarations calling for their skills and services, wrote letters to newspapers, and served in combat roles. Women continued their service in battlefield corps, on the city's ramparts and barricades, in municipal hospitals and soup kitchens, and contributed to funds paying for war materiel. During the Commune, they wore soldiers' attire, loaded and fired weapons, received pay and acknowledgment as

heroes; some passed as boys while mothers searched piles of bodies for their daughters. “Taking their place without begging for it,” women disputed, even defied, male practices that might exclude them from the new order offered by the Commune. The volatile weeks of the Commune disallowed easy application of old rules and discourse.

The historical particulars of the Commune offered language and forums for women to position grievances, formerly rendered “private,” as relevant to the new order. In so doing, they revealed the nature of their participation in this revolution – and of the revolution itself. Women supported demands for equal pay and education and the replacement of nuns by *citoyennes* on the battlefield and as laborers. The Commune provided equal payment for all Guards of similar rank – male or female – and payments to a soldier’s survivors, whether legal marriage or paternity existed. In the case of the Commune, women’s understanding of its potential sometimes contradicted men’s, or at least included considerations that enlarged its purview. André Léo – her name an act of gendered agency preceding the Commune – could simultaneously be addressed as “Citoyen” and “Madame.” Examining women’s speech, political pressure, and military roles during the Commune may eventually provide a basis for revealing and comparing the nature of women’s participation in other revolutions and political struggles for equality, including the violence that accompanies them. Women’s revolutionary goals did not offer a consistent, unified front, however.

Women thought and believed a range of ideas, with some articulating a gendered analysis that predates a parallel feminist explanation of women's inequality by virtually a hundred years. Noticing what women did during the siege, not just the Commune, exposes the material foundation of their analysis, though many likely saw the world in such terms long before. Siege- and then Commune discourse often validated women's important presence in re-created public spheres, offering women legitimized access. "Lumbering giants" and "wild-eyed viragos" may not have existed, but large, strong communardes and fervent, armed revolutionaries who killed men surely appeared on the streets of Paris. While hysterical "*pétroleuses*" likely did not exist, women who consciously set fire to buildings – and evacuated residents first – did. Statistics remain unclear, but most appear to have understood what they were doing, having reasons for taking this action. At times, these reasons had a personal history predating the Commune. For some, this point likely contributed to their summary executions, as a rational destruction of bourgeois property was a greater threat than a reaction based in insanity. Many ordinary, often anonymous, women took part, leaving us to look carefully for their presence in extant records – and to wonder why so many records disappeared. The Commune's impermanence hinders finding their traces.

Events as dramatic – and bloody – as the Paris Commune do not disappear without signs, even when a "winning" government builds a basilica to erase memories and exculpate sins. If lasting political changes are the only markers of revolutions and their success, this one failed. However, men on the "losing" side of

this revolution, if they survived, became icons of socialist revolutionary change, leaving Lenin to base the success of his “working man’s” revolution on how many days it outlasted the seventy-two of the Commune. Collective memory of the Commune aided socialists of the 1930s and since. When Paris elected a socialist mayor in 2000, the international press regularly described him as, “the first socialist mayor of Paris since the Commune,” considerably tweaking the official trajectory of that city’s recognized municipal elections with the statement.<sup>3</sup> However, aside from representations of hellacious *pétroleuses* and occasional mentions of Louise Michel, women all but disappeared, with no laudatory parallels for their devotion to “socialist” causes.

The final, bloody week of the Commune ended the Revolution and women’s visible, even violent, presence in significant political and social change in France for some time to come. The Government of Moral Order curtailed their public utterances; their overt political pressure tactics and military participation met a sudden end. Post-Commune feminists intentionally disassociated themselves from communardes, having, they believed, learned from their demise. A limited focus on suffrage became the primary feminist goal, although one not achieved until after women had yet again donned arms and died as resistance fighters in a total war against fascists. In France’s 1944 “liberation,” women’s bodies again paid gendered prices, with rapes, arrests, and summary executions not uncommon – but they received suffrage. Marxists – historians and otherwise – held the Commune dear, but

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<sup>3</sup> Similar to the city’s official mayoral history, the APP houses visual images of the city’s police prefects, omitting any reference to those occupying the position during Commune weeks.

generally focused on its gendered-male socialist leanings, omitting women's analysis from what its revolutionary socialism implied. Women, however, understood revolution well.

Analyzing a range of sources, assessing the Commune day-by-day, allows a clearer view of events and ordinary women's significance in them. This is especially true for arenas in which women asserted their importance and on which authorities focused. Malenfant Rouchy concluded her account by summarizing, "in revolutions, there is no tomorrow, it is always an unknown."<sup>4</sup> For communardes and people of their classes more generally, that statement may represent their lives. Without suffrage or sentencing records functioning as restrictions on analytical lenses, ignored subtleties enter the foreground. Noticing women's prominence in the public, political arenas that arose overnight with the declaration of the Republic on 4 September 1870, allows for a greater understanding of the trajectory that encouraged their Commune participation. The siege economically devastated Paris, but that same devastation allowed for alterations in social and political norms, which had previously limited women's public and military presence. Communarde, Eliska Vincent, wrote at the end of her manuscript that, after all, "We only had two months of history."<sup>5</sup> However, the rhetoric, political clout, and military endeavors of women such as Vincent changed this Revolution, leaving a legacy of their efforts that many tried to erase.

Studying communardes in this light does not simply reveal a marginal group

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<sup>4</sup> Victorine Brocher, *Souvenirs d'une morte vivante* (Paris: François Maspero, 1977[1909]), 196.

<sup>5</sup> BMD/ms168/d'Eliska Vincent, 14.

on the fringes – “an activist minority of less than 100.” Importantly, it reveals a chapter in the history of revolution, showing the Commune to be a moment in which women rhetorically and physically occupied public, political space, arguing for centrality in social, economic, and political change. That their occupations of those spaces did not attain normative status during the Third Republic does not deny their significance; rather, it poses questions that may potentially illuminate whole areas of the history of that Republic, and of women and revolution more generally. As Carolyn Eichner recently demonstrated, women’s Commune participation reveals a chapter in the evolution of feminist identity, even if the chapter was rendered invisible for more than a century. The Third Republic’s fitful start – variously dated from 1870, 1871, 1873, and 1875 – had much to do with the Commune, the siege, and military defeat; the Third Republic’s demise may yet reveal their imprints. Discrepancies in the dating of the Republic’s genesis, however, contributed to obscuring the Commune’s – and communardes’ – relevancy. Nathalie Duval LeMel articulated the unfinished nature of the revolution when stating upon her arrest, “We are beaten, but not vanquished!” Whatever the accepted date of the Third Republic’s formation, further research may yet indicate how much its leadership, many of whom played prominent roles in the Commune’s annihilation, understood that threat – and women’s place in it.

Louise Michel epitomizes the representation of The Communarde, if not all communardes. Intentionally not a focus of this dissertation, Michel, by far, has received the bulk of attention afforded women of the Commune. However,

communarde, Céleste Hardouin, exposed the challenge of that iconic representation, realistically noting, “Not all women are Louise Michels.”<sup>6</sup> The statement concluded her description of one woman’s surrender of information to prison officials after undergoing torture in post-Commune prison. In her comment, Hardouin references Michel’s consistent reputation as a revolutionary, willing to defy those men in power to the death, if necessary, while never implicating anyone but herself. The fact she maintains a hallowed place in the history of Revolution, Socialism, Anarchism, Women, even of France, indicates more than her exceptionalism. For its supporters, one individual came to define women’s participation in the Commune. Consequently, until recently historians responding directly or obliquely to Thomas’s questions have missed the fact that the wide array of women whose acts Michel’s do not precisely represent have remained hidden in her looming shadow. While Michel did a great deal to encourage her own prominence, her attempts to take credit for so much often served to shield others; she never implied she thought other communardes unimportant. While I posit that Michel remains grossly underacknowledged in her feminist and revolutionary analysis and contributions, so do those residing in her shadow. Malenfant Rouchy asserted her presence as soon as the Republic began, taking her child with her, as her father had done with her in 1848. She remained a revolutionary throughout her life. This study brought more “souvenirs of revolutionaries” out from the shadows, into the public political and military arena that was the Paris Commune.

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<sup>6</sup> Mme Céleste Hardouin, *Détenue de Versailles en 1871* (Paris: Chez l’auteur, 1879), 72.



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